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editorial



THIS ISN'T THE DEPARTMENT TO argue over the relative merits or demerits of a book, and I'm not going to comment on *Science and Fiction*—that is Harby's job. One thing, however, about the book which struck me as good; that is that the author has attempted to make a workable definition of science fiction.

Patrick Moore has divided science fiction into two types:

Type 1, stories which are scientifically inaccurate;

Type 2, stories which are as accurate as they can be made in the light of our present-day knowledge, though a good deal of licence must necessarily be allowed.

I think that he has hit upon a good, workable definition.

Type 1 we needn't argue about. Stories which make no claim to have any relationship with science in any form are not, and never have been, science fiction. They are pure fantasy and no one has ever seriously argued about it. We are not talking now of stories in which there is a doubt, but of stories in which the action or motivation is outrightedly im-

possible. Stories in which authors totally ignore the fact that there is no breathable air on the Moon, that there is no pressure way down deep in the sea, or that there is an effective size limitation—on this planet—to the size of insects, known insects that is, all come under the heading of pure fantasy.

They can be good, clean, entertaining fun, but they are not science fiction.

Type 2 is something else, but here we hit a snag.

Stories which are scientifically accurate in the light of our present-day knowledge?

Well, how much do we actually *know* and how much do we tend to take as proven without any real proof at all?

Would a story about a faster-than-light drive be out because Einstein's theory of relativity "proves" that such a drive would be scientifically inaccurate? The theory, of course, "proves" nothing of the kind. Instantaneous radio transmission between stellar systems? That one is out because we know that radio has a limiting factor. Men being able to

live in space without protection? Sorry, not that one, either. We know that without protection our spaceman's blood would boil in his veins. Extra-terrestrial life on other worlds? Why not? No one has ever been there yet to prove that such life could not exist. So?

So, what is admissible and what isn't?

I think that it is possible to merge type 1 and type 2 into one composite whole. To attempt to define and corral stories into categories gets progressively harder the more categories you have. Stories which are scientifically inaccurate is a meaningless term until you can define just what "scientifically accurate" means. Does it mean that all stories must be related to the test tube, the drawing board or the factory? In that case no story written about a spaceship, or a story using a spaceship as a means of transportation, can be termed science fiction. You can't be scientifically accurate about something which does not exist.

And the future does not exist.

Let us clarify. As a working basis, let us say that any science fiction story must not be, or contain, premises, which are demonstrably scientifically inaccurate. I think that that is a fair definition. Unless someone can point out the scientific absurdity of a story they have no right or reason to condemn it on any

ground save that it is poor entertainment. Poor to them, that is, and that is strictly a personal criticism.

On the other hand, no author has the right to expect anyone to laud his work unless it can stand the above test. Authors who deliberately, through carelessness or otherwise, fill their stories with scientific absurdities, can expect all they get.

Good authors know this and know the way around it. No instantaneous radio? Then invent a supra-radio working on a different principle—and offend no one. No faster-than-light drive? Then invent a hyper-warp mechanism which leaves those who support Einstein happy—and still allows the story to move. And they are right.

Science fiction is imaginative entertainment, and to entertain you must not allow anything to break the illusion you are trying to make. Scientific absurdities do that faster than anything else. And there is no need for them, none at all.

For it isn't the job of the science fiction writer to narrow his field down to the limits set by recognised science.

It is for science to catch up with the imagination of the science fiction writer.

And the faster they do that the better.

E. C. TUBB





What Triumphs?

by BRIAN W. ALDISS

He came from the depths of space into the heart of the galaxy to carry a message to the race of Man. And the message was death.

YOU NEVER KNEW THE beginning of that train of events which would lead you to Yinnisfair and a world of shadows.

You never knew the Shouter by name. To you he was just a man

who shouted and died as you reached him. But before that the Shouter had a long, tarnished history. He operated far from what most men reckon as civilization, right out on the rim of the galaxy, so that on his frequent

flits from one planet to another he rarely saw stars on both sides of his cabin. There they would be, a whole galaxy full on one side and on the other—a cliff of emptiness that stretched from eternity to eternity, the distant island universes only accentuating the gulf.

The Shouter generally kept his eyes on the stars.

But not on this trip. The Shouter was a spoolseller by trade; his little craft was packed with racks and racks of microspools. He had all kinds, new and antiquarian; philosophical, sociological, mathematical; if you went through them systematically, you could almost piece together the æon-old history of the galaxy. It was not, however, on these learned spools that the Shouter made his best money; they paid for the fuel, but not the drinks. The spools which really brought in the profits dealt with a subject older than history, and with figures more ineluctable than any in the mathematician's vocabulary; their subject, in short, was Desire. But a little yearning is a dangerous thing, and Shouter stood in perpetual fear of the customs officials.

Now he was elated. He had just neatly outwitted the petty guardians of morality and sold about half his holdings under their very eyes. Well stocked with drink, he

was heading for fresh fields of commerce.

That he took too much drink was to influence your entire life. It was hot in the small cabin of his ship, and he dozed off, sprawling over the controls. One or two little switches were pressed forward by his sleeping head . . .

Shouter woke muzzily. He sensed something was wrong and his head cleared at once. There were no clouds of stars in view. He yelped in dismay. Hurriedly, he flipped on rear vision; there lay the galaxy, like a tinsel egg on a plate. Shouter swallowed, and checked fuel. Low. Enough to get back on. Fuel, however, was in much better supply than air. The oxygen tanks had not been replenished in the hurry of his last departure. He would never get back alive on the thimbleful that remained.

With an abyss opening in his stomach, Shouter turned to the forward ports again to examine an object he had previously ignored. Apart from the distant phantoms of other galaxies, it was the only object to relieve the inane ubiquity of vacuum—and it was showing a disc. He checked with his instruments. Undoubtedly, it was a small sun.

It puzzled Shouter. His astronomical knowledge was negligible, but he knew that, according to the laws, there was nothing between galaxies. This might be a tramp

star; such things were known, but they naturally roved inside the giant lens, in conformity with its gravitational pull. Shouter threw the problem aside unsolved. All that vitally concerned him was if the sun—wherever it came from—had one or more oxygen-type planets in attendance.

It had. The sun was a white dwarf with one planet almost as big as itself. A quick stratospheric test as Shouter glided into a braking orbit showed a breathable nitrogen-oxygen balance. Blessing his luck, the spoolseller sped down and landed.

He walked out of the airlock in good fettle, leaving the compressor-analyser systems working; that would ensure full tanks of purified oxygen within half an hour.

It was hot outside. Shouter had an immediate impression of newness everywhere. Everything seemed fresh, gleaming. Reassuringly, there were no signs of animal life. The trees were of species he failed to recognise, although to Shouter one tree was much like another.

The shores of a lake lay only a few yards away. He began to walk towards it, conscious at the same time of a vague discomfort in his breathing. With conscious effort, he inhaled more slowly—the air might be too rich for him.

Something rose to the surface of the lake a distance away. It looked like a man's head, but Shouter could not be sure of that; a mist rising from the lake, as if the waters were hot, obscured detail. It seemed unlikely that a man should be swimming there—

The hurt in his lungs became more definite. He was conscious, too, of a smart spreading across his limbs, almost as if the air were too harsh for them. He had the assurance of his instruments that all was well; but suddenly that assurance meant nothing—he was in pain.

All in a panic, Shouter turned to get back to his ship. He coughed and fell, dizziness overcoming him. Now he saw it was, indeed, a man in the lake. He shouted for help.

You looked across at him, and at once started to swim in his direction.

But Shouter was dying. His cry brought blood up into his throat, splashing out over one hand. He choked, attempting to rise again. You climbed naked out of the lake towards him. He saw you, turning his head heavily, and flung one arm out gesturing towards the ship with its imagined safety. As you got to him, he died.

For a while you stood considering. Then you turned away from him and regarded the spaceship

for the first time. You went over to it, your eyes full of wonder.

The sun rose and set twenty-five times before you mastered all that Shouter's ship contained. You touched everything gently—almost reverently. Those microspools meant little individually to you at first, but you were able to refer back to them and piece the jigsaw of their secrets together. Shouter's projector was almost worn out before you finished. Then you investigated the ship itself, sucking out its meaning. You sipped Shouter's firewater. You read his log. You tried on his clothes. You saw yourself in his mirror.

Your thoughts must have moved strangely in those twenty-five days, like sluice gates opening for the first time.

All you learnt then was already knowledge; the way in which you pieced it together was pure genius, but, nevertheless, it was knowledge already held by many other people, the results of research and experience. Only after, when you had integrated that knowledge, did you make a deduction on your own behalf. The deduction, involving as it did all the myriad lives in the galaxy, was so frightening that you tried to evade it.

You could not. For one clinching fact was the death of Shouter; you knew why he had died. So, you had to act.

Just for a moment, you looked

at your world. You would return to it, but first, duty had to be done. Then you climbed up into the ship, punched out a course on the computer, and headed towards the galaxy.

II

YOU CAME UNARMED INTO THE warring city. Your ship lay abandoned on a hill some miles away. You walked as if among the properties of a dream, and demanded to see the leader of the rebel army. They put innumerable difficulties in your way, but eventually you stood before him.

He was a hard man with an eye missing, and he was busy when you entered. He stared at you with deep mistrust through that single eye; the guards behind him stroked their fusers.

"I'll give you three minutes," One-Eye said.

"I don't want your time," you said easily, "I have plenty of my own. I also have a plan bigger than any plan of yours. Do you wish me to show you how to subjugate the Region of Yinnisfair?"

Now One-Eye looked at you again. He saw—how should I put it?—he saw you were not as other men, that you were vider than they. But the Region of Yinnisfair lay long light years away, impregnable in the heart of

the Galaxy; for twice a million years its reign had been undisputed among twice a million planets.

"You're mad!" One-Eye said. "Get out! Our object is conquering this city—not a galaxy."

You did not move. Why did the guards not act then? Why did not One-Eye shoot you, before you had begun your task?

"This civil war you wage here is fruitless," you said. "What are you fighting for? A city. The next street. A post office. These are spoils fit only for hyenas."

One-Eye stood up, showing his teeth. The unkempt hair on his neck rose like prickles. He jerked up his fuser and thrust it towards your face. You did nothing; there was nothing you needed to do. One-Eye sat down again. He had not met such relentless indifference to threats before, and it impressed him.

"Owler is only a poor planet," he muttered. "But it is my world, so I have to fight for it and the people on it, and protect their rights. I admit that a man of my tactical ability deserves a better command, but when we've brought this city to its knees . . ."

Because time was on your side, you had patience. Because you had patience, you listened to One-Eye. His talk was at once grandiose and petty; he spoke largely of the triumph of human

rights and narrowly of the shortage of trained soldiers. He wanted Heaven on Earth, but he was a platoon short.

He was a man who won respect from his fellows—or fear if not respect. Yet his principles were old fashioned a hundred years ago, before the first beginnings of space travel. They had worn wafer thin, used over and over again by countless petty generals: the need for force, the abolition of injustice, the belief that right would win through. You listened with a chill pity.

And then you told One-Eye your plan for conquering Yinnisfair. You told him that living on Owler, on the cold rim of the Galaxy, he could have no idea of the richness of those central worlds. That all the fables the children of Owler learnt in their meagre beds did not convey one tenth of the wealth of the Emperors of Yinnisfair. That every man there had his destiny and happiness guarded imperishably. That every fruit warmed by the mid-galactic suns contained as much juice as fifty of Owler's wretched mangoes.

"Well, we were always underprivileged," growled One-Eye. "What can anyone here do against the power of the Region?"

So you told him, unsmilingly, that there was one respect in which Yinnisfair was inferior; it

could not, in all its systems, command a general who displayed the sagacity and fearlessness that One-Eye was renowned for.

"That is so," One Eye admitted reluctantly. "Though I have never cared to say so myself. They are a decadent lot!"

"Decadent! That is the word," you exclaimed. "They are decadent beyond all belief. They hang like a giant, over-ripe peach on a tree, waiting to drop and *splash*"—you illustrated your words with a dramatic gesture—"against the iron of your attack!"

"You really think so?"

"I know so! Listen. How long has there been peace throughout the galaxy—except, of course, for your little difference of opinion here? For millions of years, is that not so? Is it not so peaceful that you could hear a pin drop in the spacelanes? So peaceful that even interstellar trade has dwindled almost to nothing? I tell you, my friend, the mighty nations of the stars have nodded off to sleep! Their warriors, their technicians, have been untested for generations. Their science rusts beneath a pool of complacency!"

Now you had One-Eye on his feet again. This time he was yours, the first of your list of conquests. He let out a roar of excitement.

"It is as you say!" he shouted.

"They wouldn't know how to fight. Come, there is no time to be lost. We will begin the liberation of the peoples of Yinnisfair tomorrow! Why couldn't I have thought of the idea myself?"

"Wait!" you said. You touched his tattered sleeve as he came round the desk; he felt something of your vitality course through him, and waited obediently. "If Owler is to conquer, it must be united. Your forces are not sufficient in themselves to match the dying might of the Region. The civil war must end."

At this One-Eye frowned, looked uncertain. The civil war was a cause dear to his heart; above all else he wanted to reduce this little city to ashes. But the greater greed won; yet still he procrastinated.

"You can't stop a civil war just like that," he protested. "It's been going on for five years now. The cause is very dear to the people's hearts—they're dying for justice itself."

"No doubt," you agreed. "All the same, they would tolerate a treaty with the forces of injustice in exchange for the chance to eat regularly and sleep comfortably and live without the sound of atomfire punctuating their thoughts."

"Supposing they would," One-Eye said. "How do we go about making peace, aside from crushing the enemy completely?"

"You and I go and see the enemy commander," you said.

And although he protested and swore, that was what you and One-Eye did.

You emerged from the rebel hiding place into an aisle of the city's ruined cathedral. Treading carefully over the debris, you left by what had been the West Gate and came to the shields of lead and sand which marked One-Eye's present forward position. Here, One-Eye began to argue again, but you silenced him. With one man to accompany you and bear the white flag of truce, you meekly put on a radiation suit as One-Eye had done and climbed out into a street.

This had once been a fine avenue. Now the tall *exoquag* trees were splintered like bone, and the fronts of many buildings still fizzled like moist sherbet. Several robotanks lay locked together on the scarred pavement. Nothing moved. But as you walked up that subtopian battleground, you must have been aware of the unseen eyes of the enemy watching you behind their levelled sights. It must have seemed, again, that you walked among the grotesque properties of a dream.

At the top of the avenue, a mechanical voice halted you and asked you what you wanted. When its attendant echoes had

gone chattering away among the ruins, One-Eye bellowed out his name and demanded to see the enemy general.

Within two minutes, a transparent disc using beamed power dropped out of the sky. A door slid open and the mechanical voice shouted: "Please get in."

You entered with your two attendants and were at once lifted to a height just above the rooftops. The disc flicked two blocks to the north and then sank again. The door opened and you climbed out.

III

YOU WERE IN A SLAUGHTER yard. No animals were here now, but a wall with a line of fuser marks heart-high showed that the place had not entirely abandoned its ancient purposes.

Two captains met you under a white flag. They saluted One-Eye and led you out of the yard, down a deep ramp. You descended to a part of the old-fashioned pneumatic running under the city, where you removed your radiation suits. Here a maze of new corridors had been constructed; down one of them you were led until a white-painted door was reached. They indicated you were to go in.

You entered.

"Well, you traitor, what makes you think you will leave here

alive?" the enemy general asked One-Eye. His uniform was trim, if worn, his eyes had a quelling fire to them, and he walked as true soldiers have walked since time immemorial: as if the discs of his backbone had all been welded together. And Welded had a little moustache which now bristled with triumph.

Temporarily forgetting all but his old feud, One-Eye advanced as if he would tear that moustache from the other's upper lip.

"Shake hands, you two," you said impatiently. "The sooner we blast off, the better."

For the first time, Welded really looked at you; he seemed instantly to comprehend that it was you rather than One-Eye with whom he had to deal. Welded was an intelligent man. Instantly, he was ice-cold; his voice ground straight off a glacier.

"I have no idea who you are, fellow," he said, "but if I have any suspicion of impertinence from you, I'll have you shot down like a dog. With your friend here, I must be more careful—his head is destined for the city gate—but you are entirely expendable."

"On that I have my own opinion," you said. "We do not come here to bandy threats, but to make you an offer. If you are prepared to listen, listen now."

In the scale of emotions, there is a stage beyond fury when

fury goes off the boil, and a stage beyond anger where it merges into fear. As Welded reached this point, he stiffened as if he would snap. He could say nothing. You began to talk of Yinnisfair, explaining the situation to him as you had to One-Eye.

Welded was a harder man to deal with than his enemy, more seasoned, more sure of himself. Though a faint, concupiscent smile curled his lip when you spoke of the richness of the Region, he never unbent. When you had finished, he spoke.

"Are you a native of Owler, stranger?" he asked.

"No," you said.

"What is your world, stranger?"

"It is a planet beyond the Galaxy."

"It is in another galaxy?"

"It is not. It is between the galaxies."

"There is nothing between the galaxies, only darkness like teeming coal dust. What is the name of the world of yours, stranger?"

"It is unnamed," you said.

Now Welded snapped a finger angrily.

"You have an odd way of trying to win my confidence, stranger," he said. "What do the inhabitants of your world call it?"

"There are no inhabitants," you said. "I am the first. It is unnamed."

"Then I will name it," Welded

sarled. "I name it Lies! All Lies! Every word a lie! You are a spy from Yinnisfair, a dupe, an assassin! Guards! Guards! Take this fool into the yard and make a puddle of him!"

As he shouted, he wrenched a fuser from its holster and turned it onto you. One-Eye kicked out and sent it flying across the room.

"Listen, you lunatic!" he roared at Welded, "would you kill this man who offers us so much? Suppose he *is* a spy from Yinnisfair—would that not make him the ideal man to lead us back there? We need not trust him. We can watch him all the time."

Even while One-Eye was speaking, the ceiling had lifted three feet and through the widening gap armed men catapulted themselves into the room, pinning you and the rebel leader into different corners. In no time, you were enmeshed in clawed, metal nets.

Welded stayed them with a raised hand.

"There is a grain of truth in what you say," he admitted reluctantly. "Guards, leave us. We had better talk."

Two hours later, when orderlies brought in tea for you and the commanders, the arguing was over and plans were being discussed. By tacit agreement, the question of your origin was abandoned; both men had decided that wherever

you came from, it was not from the Region of Yinnisfair. Nobody from that vast empire had bothered with the outer rim of the galaxy for millennia.

"I came to you," you told them, "because this is one of the few planets near my world on which any form of military organisation still survives."

At that, they were flattered. They failed to see you were, in effect, regarding them merely as remnants of an outdated creed. The only advantage of a military organisation over any other, from your point of view, was its ability to get into action without delay.

Two hours later still, when one of Welded's aides-de-camp entered with whisky for them, Welded was just making the last of numerous calls to the garrisons of Owler.

"How many interplanetary vessels do you hold that can be put into active service at once?" he asked into the speaker. "... Yes, all told. I see: fifteen. How many of those are light-drive? ... Only five ... What type are those five?"

He wrote the answers down, reading them out as he did so, for your benefit and One-Eye's.

"One freighter ... One liner converted to military use ... One trooper ... And two Invaders. Good. Now give their tonnages."

He wrote the tonnages down,

scowled, nodded and said with authoritative sharpness of voice to the unseen commander: "Excellent. You will receive instructions in the morning as regards fueling and equipping of those five ships. As for the other ten—get your Electronics Arm cracking on them straight away. I want them equipped with light drive and ready to bust vacuum within forty-eight hours. Is that understood . . . ? And please confine all your men to camp until further orders. Is *that* understood . . . ? Good. Any queries . . . ? I leave it all to your ingenuity, commander. Goodnight. A jolt in the teeth for him," Welded said with satisfaction as he signed off.

For the first time, he regarded the aide-de-camp who had brought in the drink.

"Is the general Cease Fire being obeyed?" he demanded.

"Absolutely," Whisky said. "The people are dancing in the streets."

"We'll give them something to dance about soon," Welded said, rubbing his hands. He turned to One-Eye, who was juggling with pieces of paper.

"What's the score?" he asked.

"Depends how many of these light drive conversion jobs actually materialise."

"With our present shortage of men and materials, say fifty per cent," Welded said.

"Right . . ." One-Eye scanned his one eye over the sheet of figures.

"Including my own fleets, say a hundred and ten ships, about two thirds of which will be military craft."

They looked at each other gloomily. Provincial though they were, the number sounded faintly small to them.

"It is ample," you said confidently.

They turned to the formidable problem of rations. The fleet could reckon on being vacuum-borne for two weeks before reaching the margins of the Region; another two and a half weeks to reach the heart; and another three days if they were actually to get to the hub-world of Yinnisfair itself.

"And that allows no time for delay—due to evasive action or battle or such," Welded said.

"Pfff! We don't evade—we go through them like knives through flesh," One-Eye said. He was infected more than Welded by your confidence.

"They may capitulate before we reach Yinnisfair itself," you said. "Then we head for the nearest planet and your men can eat themselves silly."

"We must have a safety margin," Welded said. "Let's call it a six weeks' journey. And we'll be five and a half thousand

strong . . ." He shook his head. "We can cope with the air supply all right. The calorie intake is going to be the snag. Those men'll eat their heads off in that time; there's just not that amount of food on all Owler. Deep freeze is our only answer. Everyone below the rank of major not on essential ship's crew travels frozen. Get me Medical on the blower—I want to speak to the Physician-General."

Whisky hastened to obey.

"What's next?" Welded asked. He was just beginning to enjoy himself.

"Weapons," One-Eye said. "First, fissionable material. My forces can't help much there. Our stocks happened to be lower than usual."

"Here's a report on our holdings as of last week," Welded said, tossing a stereoeed list over. "Stocks are very meagre, I'm afraid."

You glanced at the list over One-Eye's shoulder.

"It is ample," you said encouragingly.

IV

AT FIRST IT MUST HAVE SEEMED as if the scheme was to succeed. Again that feeling that you lived in an unlikely dream whose scenery you could puncture

with a finger must have assailed you, as you sat in the flagship with the two commanders. You had no nerves; you did not worry. Welded and One-Eye, in their different ways, both showed strain now that they were embarked. The captain of the ship, Fleet-Commander Prim, had to endure much quiet nagging.

The early days passed uneventfully. Beyond the ports, space hung like a becalmed flag, its blazing stars mere belches in the distance, its ancient splendours nothing more than points to navigate by. The other ships were not visible to the unaided eye—Flagship might have been travelling alone. The total number of ships in the invasion fleet was one hundred and seventeen when they blasted from Owler, but by the end of the first week five had had to give up and limp home again, their too-hastily contrived light drives burnt out. It would take them, under maximum thrust, half a year to regain port; by then, their crews would be asphyxiated or the survivors breathing the oxygen of murdered men. The rest of the fleet sailed imperturbably on, holds full of soldiers in suspended animation, all neatly stacked and racked like bottles.

They had been vacuum-borne sixteen days, and were past those stars generally regarded as being outposts of the great empire of

Yinnisfair, when they were first challenged.

"A station calling itself Camœns II RST225," the communications officer reported, "asks us why we have passed Wolf Tangent Ten without identifying ourselves."

"Let it keep on calling," you said.

Other challenges were received and left unanswered. The fleet stayed silent as it startled to life the worlds it passed. Communications began to intercept messages of alarm and warning between planetary stations.

"Shepson Sabre calling Rolf 158. Unidentified craft due to pass you on course 99GY4281 at 07.1430 Gal approx . . ."

"Sol III to Schiaparelli Base. Look out and report on fleet now entering Home Sector Paradise 014 . . ."

"Brindisi Astronomical to Pylon. Unidentified ships numbering 130 approx. now crossing Scanning Area Code Diamond Index Diamond Oh Nine . . ."

One-Eye snorted his contempt.

"We've certainly set these tinpot globes in a flutter," he said.

But as the hours passed, he grew less easy. Space, which had been almost silent a watch ago, now became murmurous with voices, and soon the murmur grew into a babel. The note of curiosity, at first little more than mild interest, showed a corres-

ponding rise through irritation into alarm.

"Perhaps we ought to answer them," One-Eye said. "Couldn't we spin them some tale to keep them quiet? Tell them we are going to pay homage, or something?"

"You need have no worry about the messages we can understand," Prim said. "We are picking up several in code now; they are the ones which should cause us most concern."

"Can't we spin some sort of a yarn to keep them quiet?" One-Eye repeated, appealing to you.

You were looking out into the darkness, almost as if you could see through the veil of it, almost as if you expected to see the messages flashing like comets before the ports.

"The truth will out," you said, without turning round.

Two days later, the paradarad picked up the first ship they had detected since leaving Owlcr. The sighting caused such a noisy squabble in Communications Bay that Prim went over to see what it was about. One-Eye, now remarkably unshaven, followed after him.

"It *can't* be a ship!" communications chief was saying.

"But it must be," his sub almost pleaded. "Look at its course—you plotted it back your-

self! It's definitely turning. What but a ship could manoeuvre like that?"

"It *can't* be a ship!" the chief repeated.

"Why can't it be a ship?" Prim asked.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but the bloody thing's at least thirty miles long."

After a second's silence, One-Eye asked, nervously: "Which way's it coming?"

The sub spoke up. He alone seemed delighted at the fish they had caught on their screen. "It has turned since we had it under observation through thirty to thirty-two degrees northerly from a course about due nor'-nor'-west with respect to the galactic quadrature."

One-Eye grasped the back of the sub's couch as if it were the sub's neck.

"What I want to know," he growled, "is if it's going away or coming towards us."

"Neither," said the sub, looking at the screen again. "It now seems to have finished turning and is moving along a course which is . . . at ninety degrees to ours. That's a right angle," he added artlessly.

"Any signal from it?" Prim asked.

"Nothing."

"Put a shot across its bows," One-Eye suggested.

"You are not grovelling along the streets of Owler now, taking pot shots at all and sundry; let it go!"

One-Eye turned angrily to find Welded there. The latter had come up on the bridge early. He stood and watched the blob fade from the paradar screen before he spoke again. Then, beckoning One-Eye aside and looking to make sure you were not then present on the bridge, he said in a low voice: "My friend, I have something to confess to you."

He looked anxiously and with distaste at One-Eye's whiskery countenance before continuing.

"My early fears are coming back to me," he said. "You know I am a man of courage, but even a hero is wise to be afraid at times. Every hour we dive deeper into a hornet's nest; do you realise that? Why, we are only two and a half weeks from the famed Yinnisfair itself! I cannot sleep for asking myself if we are not running our necks into a noose."

Reluctant as he was to agree with his old enemy, One-Eye could not miss this chance of confiding his own anxieties.

"They have ships thirty miles long!" he said. "How could we fight anything that big? But what can we do? We must go on now we have started. Have you any ideas?"

Nodding mysteriously, Welded

persuaded the other down to his cabin before he would say more. Then he thumped the bulkhead.

"Only a watch's journey from here," he said, thumping again for emphasis, "are many rich planets. They will be as rich as the planets in the heart of the Region—but less well-guarded. Can't you just picture them at this very moment—loaded with plump women with rings on every finger, and fat little men dallying with semi-blondes? They're wide open! Defenceless! Why go on to Yinnisfair, where undoubtedly we shall meet with resistance? Why not stop here, plunder what we can, and get back to Owler while the going's good?"

One-Eye hesitated, his lip thrust out. He liked the suggestion every bit as much as his ex-enemy had expected he would. But there was one major obstacle, and he voiced it now.

"He's set his heart on getting to Yinnisfair itself."

"Yes! And I think we've put up with *him* long enough," Welded replied.

They did not need to mention your name. When away from the aura of your presence, their misgivings about you were mutual. Welded crossed to a cupboard and took out a small and tightly-stoppered bottle, which he handed to One-Eye.

"That should solve *that* problem," he said.

"Good God!" One-Eye said, and put the bottle down gingerly. It contained the venom of the grusby, a deadly Owlerian tropical snake; to smell one drop of it a yard away would give any man a headache for a week.

"Something to flavour his wine with tonight," Welded said.

V

WHEN THE WINE WENT ROUND the captain's table after dinner, One-Eye accepted his glass but could not drink. He felt sick with suspense, and with the sickness went a loathing for Welded; not only did he disapprove of poisoning as a namby-pamby method of killing, but he understood clearly that the little bottle held more than enough to spare for him, too, should Welded feel like killing two birds with one snake.

You had no such qualms. As always, you were in good fettle. You took your glass when it was filled, toasted, as you did every night, the success of the expedition, and drained down the wine.

You made a moue of displeasure.

"This wine tastes flat," you said. "We will stock up with better vintages on Yinnisfair."

Everyone round the table laughed with you, except One-Eye; the muscles of his face had seized

up. He could not even force himself to look at Welded.

"What did you make of the thirty-mile-long object we sighted earlier?" Prim asked you, taking his wine at a more sedate pace.

"Oh, it was a Yinnisfair ship all right," you said easily. "It is nothing to worry about. Evolution will take care of it, just as evolution took care of the monster prehistoric reptiles which once roved Owler and other planets."

The captain spread his hands.

"For a practical man, that is a strangely unpractical remark," he said. "Evolution is one thing, super-ships quite another."

"Oh no, not at all—or only so if you forget that evolution is nature's scientific method, and spaceships, not being organic creatures, are a part of man's evolution. And man himself—he's only a part of nature's scientific method."

The captain, who distrusted speculation, withdrew into his shell of primness.

"I trust you don't imagine, at this late date in time, that man is *not* the end-product of evolution?" he asked you. "We are constantly being told the galaxy is too old for all but—final extinction."

"I imagine nothing," you told him pleasantly. "But remember, what triumphs ultimately is something too big for your comprehension or mine."

WHAT TRIUMPHS?

You stood up, and the others followed suit. Soon the dining room was empty except for the two conspirators. One-Eye swabbed his brow.

"You had me on tenter-hooks," he said. "Couldn't you manage to smuggle that muck into his wine tonight?"

Welded was as rigid and military as ever; but he quivered like a taut bowstring. He evidently found difficulty in getting the words round his dry tongue.

"He didn't have any wine tonight," Welded managed to whisper. "That was the grusby juice he drank—neat. We should be pushing him feet-first through the airlock by now!"

For just over four weeks, the Owler fleet had been vacuum-borne. By now they were deep into the star-clotted heart of the galaxy and within six days' flight of Yinnisfair itself. Suns which carried as an incidental burden more than a hundred million years of the histories and myths of man burned on all sides of them like funeral torches. The funeral air was reinforced by silence over all wavebands—the chatter of alarmed planets had died away to nothing.

"They're waiting for us!" One-Eye exclaimed, not for the first time. He lived on the bridge now, having his bed there and taking

his meals sitting on his bed. For hours at a time he peered out at the apparently motionless spectacle of the universe, haunted by two fears—the fear of you had grown to rival and even eclipse the fear of Yinnisfair.

Much to the captain's unstated disapproval, the bridge had also become Welded's living quarters. He spent most of the time lying on his bed with a fuser under his pillow, and never looked out of the ports.

You came frequently up to the bridge, but spoke infrequently to the two commanders. You were detached; it might have been all a dream to you, a dream in which the lineaments of illusion had worn thin . . . Yet for all that, you were at times noticeably impatient, speaking abruptly sometimes, sometimes clicking your fingers in suppressed irritation, almost as if you wished to wake from the tedium of your sleep.

Only Captain Prim remained completely unchanged. The routine of command stayed him. He seemed to have absorbed all the confidence One-Eye and Welded had lost.

"We shall be grounded on Yinnisfair in six days," he said to you. "Is it possible they intend to offer us no resistance?"

"It is possible to think up excellent reasons for their non-resistance," you said. "Owler

has been isolated from the empire for generations, and has no knowledge of current attitudes within the Region. They may all be pacifists, eager to prove their faith. Or, at the other end of the scale, their military hierarchy, without war to thin its ranks, may have collapsed like piecrust under our unexpected pressure. It's all speculation . . ."

"Supposing," the communications sub ventured from his couch. "Supposing the whole lot—everyone on all these worlds—had died long ago, and nobody outside the Region knew about it . . . I mean, it's so dead quiet . . ."

They were the last words he ever spoke. At that second, the paradar exploded, shattering the sub's head like a coconut. An icy clatter rang along the floor as ruptured metal and glass showered out of the panel, and gusts of acrid smoke settled like mesh over the bridge.

"Fetch communications chief from his bed," Prim barked, but Continuity was already on the job, calling over the intercom for a stretcher party and the electronics crew.

Welded was inspecting the damage, fanning away smoke which still siphoned out of a red-hot crater in the panels. His spine arched as tensely as a prestressed girder.

"What caused that?" he asked.

"A circuit fault? A transistor blowing?"

"Couldn't be," Prim snapped, for once happy to contradict his superior. "Would you mind standing clear, please? The repairs crew must see to it at once."

"Look!" called One-Eye. The hysterical edge to his voice was so compelling that even in this moment of crisis every eye present swivelled to where his rigid finger pointed. Out, out they stared into the hard pageant of night. Their eyes had to probe and focus before they saw.

Flies. Flies, rising in a cloud from a dark stream, on whose surface sunlight glittered, so that between dark and light the insects were almost lost to view. But the stream was space itself and the glitter a spangle of suns, and the flies spread across them a cloud of ships; the ancient forces of Yinnisfair were rising.

VI

"**YOU CAN'T COUNT THEM!**" One-Eye said, glaring aghast at the swarm of ships. "There must be thousands of them. What are we going to do? *They* blew out the instrument panel—it was a sort of warning, don't you see! They'll blow us into Kingdom Come at any moment!"

He coughed the words like sand out of his throat. Then it

was as if he had to do something at any cost, to hide his helplessness. Turning on a heel, he crossed the promenade. He was standing in front of you now.

"You brought us into this!" he shouted. "What are you going to do to get us away? How do we save ourselves?"

"Leave that to the captain and be silent," you said. You moved away before he touched you and stood by the captain. Prim was at his primmest, dealing out orders with the iron efficiency of a school marm. The short-wave was unimpaired, and he spoke rapidly to the squadron leaders of his fleet. On a live schematic above his head, the results of those orders immediately became apparent. The Owlerian fleet was deploying into its individual squadrons, spreading into a fan parsecs wide. The ships moved towards the curtain of flies like an opening hand. At maximum speed they moved, straight for the enemy navies.

"They're too ready for us," Prim said to you out of the corner of his dry mouth. "This will never shake them. We'll never get through! There aren't enough of us to be effective."

"What else do you suggest?" you asked him.

"If every ship made for a planet, orbited it, held it under threat of demolition—no, they'd pick us off one by one . . ." He

shook his head. "This is the only possible way," he said, again turning all his attention to the manœuvre.

Time for further talk was gone. The waiting ships and the handful of charging ships slid together. The gulf between the two fleets was suddenly trellised with blue flame, electric, blinding. Square links of force opened and shut like champing mouths. Whatever its power source, the drain must have been phenomenal, consuming the basic energies of space itself.

The Owlerian ships found themselves onto the strange defence before evasion was more than a panicky thought. That chopping trellis flared before their ports, snapped, was gone, flared and snapped again, bathing every bridge in its eccentric luminance. It was the last light thousands of eyes ever saw. The ships on which those blue jaws closed burned magnesium-bright; they burned, then sagged like rotten bananas into limbo, leeches of life.

But the invaders were tearing through space at a formidable speed. Nor was the terrifying trellis properly in phase; whoever controlled it could not control its precise adjustment; its scissor action was too slow—many ships hurtled through its interstices and into the ranks of the Yinnisfair fleet.

Flagship came through. The trellis snapped uselessly behind it.

A quick glance at the schematic showed Prim he had only about forty ships left.

"Superfusers—fire!" he roared.

Nobody in that immense melee of armour had ever been in a space battle before. The galaxy in its tired old age had long since hung up its swords. Of all the astute brains following the rapid interplay of strategy, Prim's was the quickest to seize advantage. The mighty ranks of Yinnisfair had placed too much reliance on their trellis device; they were temporarily numbed to find survivors on their side of it. Owlter shook them out of their numbness.

Sunbursts of superfusers cascaded among them, leaping and feeding from ship to ship, while the attackers plunged through their devastated ranks and were away. But the Yinnisfair vessels were also in rapid movement. In no time they had dispersed, safe from the fusion centre where twenty score of their sister ships perished.

"We're through!" you said. "On to Yinnisfair itself. It will ransom our safety!"

The enemy fleet was not so easily outdistanced, however. Several units were already overtaking them at staggering speed. Among them was the thirty-mile-long craft they had sighted some days ago.

"And there are three more like it!" Welded yelled from his position at the ports. "Look! How can anything travel that fast?"

Prim wrenched the Flagship into a spin south. They altered course just in time. The overtakers launched a black mass like smoke directly ahead of their old position; the smoke was molecularised ceetee, which would have riddled the Flagship like moth in carpet, leaving it mere gravel over the spaceways. In this manoeuvre, sight of the four giant vessels was lost. Then they spun into sight again, and with mind-wrenching turns formed the four points of an enormous square ahead of Flagship.

"No human could stand G's like that. They are robot-controlled," you said, gripped by the fascination of battle.

"And they put out the trellis screen!" Prim said. It was a flash of inspiration, shortly to be proved correct. He turned and barked orders at Bombardment Bay, telling them to get the giants at any cost. By now, Flagship was on its own, the rest of its company scattered or disintegrated.

The giants were in position. Again the hellish blue pattern scissored across Flagship's course. Prim had no time to swerve away—they racketted towards the dazzling pattern. At the last

second, someone in Bombardment fired a superfuser right ahead.

Superfuser and trellis met.

The two insensate energies clawed each other like beasts of prey. Instead of spreading its usual type of explosion, the fusion climbed the writhing squares of trellis. At the centre, it left a widening circle of nothingness, through which Flagship shot, unharmed. It climbed to the trellis corners, barbed fire climbing fire. It reached the four giant vessels.

Just for a moment they remained intact, each radiating a three-dimensional rainbow which flickered magically up and down the spectrum and must have been visible hundreds of light years away. And then that blinding beauty fused, the four orbs merged and became anti-light. They sucked, guttered and went out—and where they had been a great gap in the nothingness of the universe appeared and spread.

Several Yinnisfair ships were engulfed in this cataclysm. But Flagship was spared no time to rejoice. The moment of its greatest triumph was also the moment of its destruction. A translucent globe from an enemy destroyer caught its dorsal vane.

Like an obscene octopus hauling itself aboard a rowing boat, the globe spread out tentacles of light and engulfed Flagship.

Prim swore furiously.

"Nothing responds any more," he said.

It was doubtful if anyone heard him. A continuous sizzle filled their ears as their body electricity jumped in protest at what was taking place. The scene was rendered in unforgettable hues of orange and black, as the light penetrated everything. Faces, clothes, floor, instruments, all were ravaged.

Then it was over, the moment of near madness. They were left in darkness, only pale starlight touching their pale faces. Prim staggered for the controls. He swept his hand wildly over banks of instruments. All were dead.

"We're finished!" he announced. "Not a whisper of life anywhere. Even the air purifier is finished."

He sank down, covering his face with his hands. For a while nobody spoke; all were emotionally drained by the apocalyptic rigours of battle, the sag of defeat.

"They must be chivalrous on Yinnisfair," you said at length. "They will have some sort of code of battle. They will come and take us from here. We shall be honourably treated."

Welded said harshly from a corner: "You still find room for cockiness! We ought to kill you now."

"Let's get him!" One-Eye said, but made no move. They were

just lumps against the wall of starlight, lumps which spoke without relevance.

"I only feel relaxed," you said. "The battle is over. We have lost honourably. Look at your captain, here, half-dead with fatigue. He fought well, resourcefully. No blame lies with him that we lost the gamble. Now he can sit back without remorse—and we can do the same—knowing the future is not in our hands. For sure they will be here to collect us at any moment, and give us an honourable trial on Yinnisfair."

The others made no answer.

VII

THE AIR ON FLAGSHIP BRIDGE was growing foul when the emissaries of Yinnisfair arrived. They cut their way rapidly through the hull, rounded up every dazed man aboard and transferred them to their own ship. Full speed was then made towards Yinnisfair. Flagship was left to its own ruined devices.

You had been given a separate room with Prim, One-Eye and Welded. The two latter had been quite drained of all life by the magnitude of recent events. They sat together now like a pair of dummies, not speaking. Prim was in better shape, but reaction had now hit him, and he lay shaking.

on a couch. So you alone stood by the port and took in the spectacle as Yinnisfair approached.

The planet, which for so many years had held the galaxy under its sway, was a curious spectacle at this late date in history. About its equator circled two splendid rings, one above the other. Of these rings, one was natural and consisted of the debris of a long-disintegrated satellite. The other ring was nothing more nor less than a scrapyard. Breaking up of spaceships on the ground had ages ago been forbidden on Yinnisfair, where piles of rusting metal were considered unsightly; instead, every fragment of scrap was thrown into the orbit of the ring. Over a vast period of time, this ring had grown until it was fifty miles deep and several hundred wide. Far from being ugly, it was a thing of beauty, one of the seventeen wonders of the galaxy. Though composed entirely of objects which ranged from old motors to spoons, from iron lungs to shreds of unidentifiable metal, it gleamed like an array of countless jewels, for every inch of metal was polished eternally by the ceaseless wash of meteoric dust.

When the ship in which you were held landed on the day side of the planet, this ring was still faintly visible, straining like an arch right round heaven.

After some delay, you and the

others were disembarked, transferred to a small surface ship and taken to the Court of the Highest. The Flagship crew was spirited off in one direction, the troops in suspended animation in another, while you and the other three were ushered into a room little bigger than a cubicle. Here again there was more delay. Food was brought, but you alone had inclination enough to eat it.

Various dignitaries visited you, most of them departing gloomily without speaking. Through a narrow window you looked out onto a courtyard. Groups of men and women stood about aimlessly, and no face was without its stamp of worry. It became clear some grave crisis pended; its threat hung almost tangibly over the whole court.

Finally and unexpectedly, an order reached your guards. With a flurry of excitement you and the three with you were brought into a marble hall of audience and so into the personal presence of the Highest, Emperor Inherit of Yinnisfair and the Region of Yinnisfair.

He was a pale man, dressed austere in dark satins. He reclined on a couch. His features were insipid, yet his eyes spoke of intelligence and his voice was firm. Though his general pose suggested lethargy, his head was

carried with an alertness that did not escape your attention.

He looked you over in leisurely fashion, weighing each of your group in turn, and finally addressed you as the obvious leader. He spoke without preamble.

"You barbarians, by the wicked folly of your actions, have brought havoc to the natural order of things; your cupidity is having repercussions everywhere."

You bowed and said with irony: "We regret it if we disturbed your great empire."

"Pah! I do not refer to the empire." He waved his hand as if the empire were a mere bauble, beneath his interest. "I referred to the cosmos itself, by whose grace we all exist. The forces of nature have become unknit."

You looked at him interrogatively, saying nothing.

"I will explain the fate which now hangs over us," the Highest said, "in the hope you may comprehend at least something of it. I would like you to die knowing a little of what you have done. Now. This galaxy of ours is old beyond imagining; philosophers, theologians and scientists combine to tell us that its duration, vast but not infinite, is nearing an end. I presume even you of the outer rim know that much?"

"The rumour circulated," you muttered.

"I am pleased to hear that some

wisdom penetrates to your benighted darkness. We have been given reason to suppose, in these last few hours, that the galaxy—like an old curtain crumbling under its own weight—may be dissolving now. That this, in fact, is the end of all things, of past and future, and of all men."

He paused in vain to watch for any shadows of alarm to cross your face, then continued, composedly.

"The dissolution was begun by your foolishness. Peace had reigned for more generations than you have hairs on your head; before your intervention, that is. But when the Region of Yinnisfair learned your fleet was on its way, we were obliged to unearth the fearful weapons of our forefathers. From every civilized planet, the ancient ships and engines of war were resurrected. Systems of production, schemes of battle, organisations of fighting men—all had to be resurrected from the dead past. It required haste such as we had never known, and regimentation such as we detested. Our every sinew was strained. Even if no greater peril beset us, that mighty effort to rearm has struck a heavy blow at our stability—it may indeed even cause the entire economic structure of empire to crash."

"That's worth a cheer, anyway," One-Eye said, with an attempt at courage.

For a long moment, the Highest regarded him superciliously, and then continued his discourse without comment.

"We found, in our hurried search for weapons to use against you, one which had been invented æons ago and never used. It was considered devastatingly dangerous, since it harnessed the electromagnetic forces of the fabric of space itself. Four gigantic machines called turbulators activated this force; they were the four ships you destroyed."

"We saw one of them on the margin of the Region days ago," Prim said. He had been following the Highest with excitement, obviously enthralled by his description of a gigantic military machine grinding into action.

"The four turbulators had to be called from the distant quarters of the Region, where our ancestors had discarded them," the Highest agreed. "They were assembled together and stationed across the course of your fleet with the results that you saw. That trellis pattern is the basic pattern of all creation itself. By a fluke, you destroyed it. Our scientists suggest that such is the antiquity of our galaxy it no longer retains its old stability; although the process is invisible, the disintegration you began is still taking place—spreading rapidly, in fact."

Prim staggered back, almost as if he had been struck. He bumped

into Welded and One-Eye, and the three stood wordlessly together.

The Highest stared at you, expecting a reply. As if uncertain for the first time, you looked searchingly at One-Eye and the others; they stared blankly ahead, too absorbed with the prospect of catastrophe to notice you.

"Your scientists are to be congratulated," you said. "They are a little late with their discovery of instability, but at least they have found it out for themselves—only my friends here and I did not begin it. It began long ago, and it was about that that I came to Yinnisfair to tell them—and you."

For the first time, the Highest showed some emotion. "You impertinent barbarian dog, you came here to rape and loot and pillage. What do you know of these matters?"

"I came here merely to announce the end of things," you told him. "How I got here, whether as captive or victor, was no concern of mine, so long as the peoples of every world had been roused to know of my coming. That was why I staged the invasion; such a thing is easily done, provided you can read and provoke the few basic human passions. If I had come here alone, who would have known it? Now the whole galaxy has its eyes open and its pupils turned *here*. They can at least die knowing the truth."

"Indeed?" The Highest raised one scornful imperial eyebrow. "Before I have you taken out and disintegrated, perhaps you would care to tell me about this truth over which you have gone to such devious trouble?"

"By all means," you replied. "Perhaps you would care for a practical demonstration first of all?"

But the Highest brushed the suggestion aside and sat up. "You are a braggart!" he said energetically. "You waste my time, and there is little enough of that left. Gentlemen of the guard, execute this fellow and have his body removed. The other three, by the look of them, will go quietly."

The guard advanced in a half-circle.

Fourteen men comprised the guard. Their uniforms were brightly unmilitary; but their long, antique swords looked functional in every inch, and now these swords were bared and pointed towards you.

Without hesitation, you advanced towards the nearest soldier who, with equal decision, threw himself at you, bringing down his sword with a heavy blow at your head. You flung up your arm and caught the blade full on it.

The sword rang and crumbled into bits, as if it had turned to dust.

The swordsman fell back in alarm.

The other guards were on you, thrusting and slicing. Their swords crumpled and snapped against you—not a one but wrecked itself against your anatomy. They flung themselves at you bodily; you pushed with your hands, their bones snapped, their arms crumpled as uselessly as their swords had done. For you it must have seemed like a fight in a dream, where every adversary is a thing of paper.

When it was borne into them that you had—how would they think of it—a secret power, they fell back, gasping and crying. You saw then that a balcony had appeared in the blank wall above you and that the snout of a wicked-looking machine was trained on you.

Despite the awe-striking scene he had just witnessed, the Highest retained his self-control.

"Before you are annihilated," he said, glancing pointedly up at the balcony, "tell me what form of trickery is this."

"Try out your next trick first," you suggested. To speed matters, you stepped towards the Highest. You had taken perhaps two paces before the machine on the balcony burst into action. A fusillade of beta pellets screamed at you, only to fall uselessly to the ground at your feet.

At last the Highest was frightened. He scrambled from his

couch, no longer the languid ruler.

"Who are you? Where do you come from?" he gasped.

"That is what I want to tell you," you said. "I see now there is some likelihood of your believing me. What I have to say must go to every one of your people, for when a great history ends it ends most fittingly if everyone knows why; a man who perishes without reason is a clown.

"I come from a new world outside this galaxy—new because there the process of creation still goes on. New galaxies are forming there out of the fathomless night. My planet is new, and I am the first man born upon it; it is still nameless."

Welded said: "So that rigmarole you told me back on Owlter was true?"

"Certainly," you said. You did not bother to tell him how you had learnt to pilot the dead Shouter's ship. You turned instead to Prim. "Do you recall a conversation we once had about evolution? You claimed that man was its end product."

Prim nodded.

"Man is evolution's finest product—in this galaxy," you told him. You looked at the Highest, at Welded, at One-Eye. You said: "You are evolution's highest flowering here. Think of the multitude of experiments nature undertook before evolving you. She started

with an amœba, a simple cell . . . She was like a child at school then, but all this while she has been learning.

"In the new galaxy from which I come, she *begins* with man. I am the earliest, most primitive form of life in my galaxy."

You went on to tell them how, even in you, radical changes had been made, some of which they might have detected under medical examination; you were, in truth, a different species from them. Your waste system was fundamentally altered, eliminating the urinary tract and sweat glands. Your windpipe was double, so that intake and outlet of air were by different channels, the whole being better protected than man's by strong cartilage. But your most radical modification lay in the reproductive faculty; not only were the old characteristics such as colour of hair transferable from one generation to another: walking and language genes ensured that those simple human skills were also inheritable. The psychological basis of your mind had also been improved, much of man's old random emotionalism being eliminated entirely; yet you had a range of altruism and identity with things surpassing man's capabilities.

The Highest heard you out in silence and then said, in a tone not devoid of awe: "If you are the first of your—ah, species,

how do you know so much about yourself?"

You smiled. It seemed a simple question.

"Because all our other improvements I mentioned are merely in some way a modification of the pattern evolution used in man's designing, but we have in addition one gift of which you never dreamed—we have awareness, not only of our psychological actions—our thoughts, if you will—but of our physiological ones. We can see into our last blood cell. In other words, we have no unconscious processes, inaccessible to us. I am integrated as you could never be; for instance, the diseases such as cancer which once scourged mankind can never touch us; we should recognise and check them at their inception. Nor do we seize up in a moment of crisis and get taken over by automatic reflexes; knowing ourselves, we are our own masters."

VIII

THE HIGHEST CAME DOWN FROM this dais. He thrust his hands into his pockets and kicked moodily at the spent pellets on the ground.

"There was enough to worry about before you arrived," he said. For a moment his face looked childishly petulant. As if

aware of your gaze fixed upon him, he turned, saying, with a forced laugh: "To be quite honest, you give me an inferiority complex! You must feel a real superman in our poor Yinnisfair."

The derision in his tone pricked you—there were enough points in common between you for that.

"If that is what it seems like to you, it feels entirely different to me," you flashed. "Didn't you understand what I told you? In my galaxy, I rank as the amœba. Should that make me proud? As to what supersedes me——"

"Don't! I shudder to think!" the Highest said, thrusting out a manicured hand. "I concede your point."

"I don't!" It was One-Eye. He had stood helplessly by with Welded and Prim, his mind filled with fruitless plots of escape. Much of what you had said had been either unheard or had gone over his head. But from the last few remarks he had caught one idea: that you were a sort of superman. Now he came up to you with a mixture of defiance and cajolery.

"You got us here, you can get us back," he said. "And let's not hang about. You heard what His Highness said about this place disintegrating. Get us back to Owlery, if you're such a superman."

You shook your head.

"You'd be no better off on Owlery, of that I assure you," you

told him. "I'm sorry you had to be involved in this, but it's been no worse for you than hiding out in the ruins of a city. And I'm no superman——"

"No superman!" One-Eye said angrily. He turned to the Highest and exclaimed: "No superman, he says. Yet he downed enough poison for an army, he fended off those swords—you saw him—he withstood a bombardment just then——"

"Listen to me!" you interrupted. "Those things belonged to a different principle. Watch this!"

You walked over to a wall. It was built of solid blocks of marble, polished and selected for its delicate patterning. You placed one hand with extended fingers upon it and pushed; when you withdrew your hand, five short tunnels had been pierced in the marble.

It was a simple demonstration, yet seemed to impress them more than anything.

You wiped your hand and returned to them, but they shuffled away from you.

"Yet I am no stronger than you," you told them. "You must believe that, for it is the truth. The only difference is this: that I come from a freshly-created world, new minted by the inexorable processes of continuous creation. And you—come from an old world."

"This we know——" the Highest began.

"Yes, you know it all—now try and understand it! Think of your galaxy. How old is it? You do not know exactly, but you know it is incredibly old. The truth is, it is wearing out, as everything wears out in time. What is everything made of? A tissue of energies which outcrops and becomes matter in the form of protons and neutrons. That tissue of energy, since the beginning of time, has been running down, wearing thin—and of course all matter has worn thin with it. The great, magical batteries of this galaxy are slowing—consequently all protons and neutrons lose their polarity. These basic bricks of which everything has to be built are now almost literally sparked out—their charges have run low, they cannot combine as they used to. Steel has not the strength that paper once possessed."

Prim interrupted him.

"You're trying to deceive us!" he told you. "It's only you who can pierce marble with a finger or withstand poison, swords or bombardment. *We* should die! Do you take us for fools?"

"No," you said. "You would die, as you say. You are composed of the same exhausted nuclei as everything else; that is exactly why you could not detect the whole process for yourselves long ago. I can withstand almost any-

thing you have to offer only because the very stuff of which I am made is new. I am the one fresh factor in an exhausted galaxy."

You paused and went over to the Highest. He had become very pale, swaying on his heels. But he recovered himself manfully and said: "I was about to call my ministers in; they will have been listening over microphones to this——" He hesitated and then said, mockingly: "My audience with you. But if what you say is true, then nothing we can do is of avail. We—we are all fading into shadows . . ."

He pulled himself up and said: "This ravening monster we loosed between us out in space—I suppose that merely hastens the exhaustion process."

"Yes."

The Highest closed his eyes, as if he could grasp the situation better in darkness. Standing thus, he looked almost wistful, but when he raised his lids again his regard fixed on you with the alertness of a hawk.

"So. Our poisons cannot affect you," he said. "Yet you manage to live among us. How can our food nourish you?"

"You have a sharp enough intelligence to answer that yourself," you told him. "I brought my private supply of calories with me

when I left my own world. I was not unprepared. I even had to bring oxygen concentrates."

You told the Highest then of the effects your unexhausted air had had on Shouter, the spoolseller, how he had been riddled as if by unseen radiations. And you told him how useful Shouter's microspool library had been.

"You are quite the opportunist," the Highest said. "My congratulations to you."

He pulled at his lip and looked for a moment almost amused.

"Have you a moment to spare? Will you come with me? Perhaps you other gentlemen will excuse us—you can take a ship back to Owler, or wherever it is, if you think it's worth it. I leave it entirely to you. My guards will not molest you."

Something in his manner had subtly changed. He motioned to you with a sharp gesture and made for a rear door. What did you do? You took a last look over your shoulder at the desolate group whose function in life had abruptly vanished, gave One-Eye a mocking salute and followed the Highest out of the door, closing it behind you.

The Highest walked down a corridor at a smart pace which belied his earlier languor. He flung open another door and you both emerged onto a balcony overlooking the proud city of Yinnis-fair. A cool evening wind blew;

cloud masked the setting sun. Nothing stirred except a fabric far below in a mansion window.

"How long would this exhaustion business have taken if we had not hurried it on?" the Highest asked, almost casually.

"It must have been worsening for centuries," you told him. "It might have gone on for centuries more . . ."

You stopped, afraid of inflicting further hurt. You felt almost a softness for him, and through him for all men, all the myriads of them. He took a deep breath.

"I'm glad it's ending *now*! It's—well, it's the end, that's all . . ."

He took another lungful of the darkening wind.

"And for the first time—I'm not bored!"

He gave a shaky laugh.

"And you have a ringside seat, my friend. It will indeed be a fine sight to see us dissolve like sugar in a strong drink! You must get back, though, before all our fine ships disintegrate. They won't be capable of carrying you much longer. Handle the toys carefully or you'll break them."

"I'll manage," you said, adding gently, "don't forget everyone must be told what is happening."

"I will not forget."

He turned and faced you.

"I'm still not sure what impulse brought you here. A sort of nostalgia? Mere curiosity? A desire to gloat, perhaps? Or pity?"

WHAT TRIUMPHS?

What feelings do you have for—us poor shadows?"

And what unexpected weakness was it choked the words in your throat? Why did you turn your face away so that he could not see your eyes?

"I wanted man to be aware of what is happening to him," you said at last. "That much was owed to him. I—we owed it to him. You are—our fathers. We are your heirs . . ."

He touched you gently and asked in a firm voice: "What exactly do you want me to tell the people of the galaxy?"

You looked out over a city now pricked with lights, and up to the drab evening sky. You found no comfort there or in yourself.

"Just tell them what a galaxy is," you said. "Don't soften the picture. Tell them it's nothing more than a gigantic laboratory for the experiments of nature, which means—so far as man is concerned—evolutionary experiments. Tell them that this laboratory here is closing down. A newer one, with more modern equipment, is opening up just down the street."

"I'll remember," the Highest said. Now his face was a shadow in the shadows.

We who have already superceded you record these scenes now in your honour, as you once honoured man. *Requiescat in pace.*

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NAME.....

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PATIENT OF PROMISE

By NIGEL LLOYD

Sometimes a joke can misfire. When a man desperately wants to believe in something he can find it impossible to do anything else. And, of course, he could be right.

NO ONE WHO IS NOT ENDOWED with more than a normal amount of compassion should ever be allowed to take care of the mentally afflicted. Unfortunately, the work is unpleasant, the rewards small and saints are scarce. It wasn't hard for Alfred Metinck to get himself a job as a male nurse at Denehaven. It wasn't even difficult for him to keep it though he was, as most of the staff admitted, more qualified to work in a prison than a hospital. Prisoners are usually considered to have merited punishment.

In a normal hospital Metinck would have been spotted and fired within a week. Even in a normal mental hospital he wouldn't have been tolerated for long, but Denehaven wasn't a normal hos-

pital. It was the end of the line for staff and patients both; a charity institution run by incompetents and filled with incurables. Little things like inexplicable bruises, displays of bad temper, harshness, general impatience and minor acts of sadism were overlooked. The inmates were fed, washed, clothed and housed, and no one was paying any money for extras. Metinck was strong, had some experience and had been willing to work for little more than bed and board. The Directors were satisfied. Metinck was not.

"A month," he said bitterly. "Four lousy weeks on the graveyard shift and now I'm worse off than when I arrived at this dump."

"I'm crying." Edward Heron looked up from his magazine, a

glossy production full of impossibly shaped pin-ups, and looked at Jolson. Jolson grunted, too busy with his eternal solitaire to take much notice. Heron sighed, lit the half of a cigarette and put down his magazine. "All right," he said tiredly. "Get it off your chest."

Heron was needling him, Metinck knew, but the way he felt any audience was better than no audience at all. He dropped into a chair and stared disgustedly at the flaking paint on the walls. The duty-room at Denehaven was both small and uncomfortable, and dirt and neglect had turned it into a masterpiece of what interior decoration should not be. Even at that it was better than the day-rooms of the patients.

"Laugh," said Metinck. "Maybe you're crazy, too."

"Who's crazy?" Jolson looked up from his cards. "You calling me crazy?"

"Anyone's crazy who would want to stay in this dump." Metinck searched for a cigarette, found one and hesitated before putting it into his mouth. Pay day was thirty hours away and he was broke. He couldn't even lift a few cigarettes off one of the patients, and the other nurses had long ago discovered his cupidity. Shrugging, he lit the cigarette; maybe he could talk the canteen into giving him credit.

"All right." Heron, disturbed

from his magazine, was determined to carry the matter to its logical conclusion. "What's stopping you from leaving?"

"I like to eat," said Metinck. "Also . . ." He broke off as a buzzer sounded from the tell-tale. "Number eighteen again; that's yours, Jolson."

Jolson calmly laid a black Jack on a red Queen. He didn't look at the board. The buzzer sounded again, two short bursts then a long one which didn't stop. Slowly, Jolson rose and left the room. When he returned he went over to the duty-book and made an entry.

"Fall down the stairs or throw himself against a door?" Heron was cynical.

"Tripped and hit his fool face smack against my fist." Jolson signed the book with a flourish. "Maybe that'll teach the damn nut to lay off that buzzer. Once I'll stand, twice maybe, but three times, no." He returned to his solitaire.

"Some of them never learn," said Heron. He wasn't disturbed by the incident, Denehaven was that kind of a place. He glanced at Metinck, his eyes glinting with malicious amusement. "You should train them better, Jolson; make them all like Thirty-two."

"Thirty-two?" Jolson looked up, caught Heron's expression then grunted. "Sure, but Thirty-

two's different. We don't get many aliens in here."

"Alien?" Metinck became alert. "A foreigner, you mean?"

"You could call him that." Heron reached for his magazine. "You haven't met him yet, him being so quiet at night and you on the graveyard shift." He turned a page. "Strange guy; claims he was dumped here from somewhere in space. Crazy, of course, but there it is." He stared appreciatively at a naked woman, waiting for Metinck to rise to the bait.

He didn't know what he had started.

It was a joke, of course, it had to be that. It was a rib, a hoax, something to kill a little time, a thing to pull on the new boy. It had to be that because it was just too impossible for it to even remotely be the truth. But if it were?

For three days Metinck did nothing about it, fighting his curiosity all the time. On the fourth day he did some checking. Checking wasn't too hard; he merely waited for an opportunity then raided the files, carrying a thick dossier back to his own room. The door locked, he opened the file on Thirty-two and felt his excitement mounting.

Thirty-two was different.

To begin with he had no name, he was a "John Doe," which was

meaningless as far as identification went. He had no nationality, no relatives, no property, not even a suit, nothing. All that was known about him was that he was male, white and over twenty-one. His age was given as approximately forty-five years. He had been committed to Denehaven ten years earlier as a charity case; the committal papers had been made out by the local authorities and Metinck couldn't blame them.

He lit a cigarette and sat back thinking about it. Thirty-two had been found by a farmer hiding in his corn field. He had been naked, had made odd gestures and seemed to be off his head. The farmer had taken him home, wrapped him in a blanket and then sent for the police. They had fed him and turned him over to the hospital for observation and a report on his mental condition. The committal order had followed as a matter of course.

Naturally.

What else could you do with a man who mouthed gibberish, who wore no clothes, had no identity and no apparent injuries to account for amnesia? More, what could you do with someone who didn't respond to treatment, who was not listed as a missing person, who had no recognizable fingerprints and who showed subtle variations in his physical make-up? Metinck leafed through the file to check on his findings.

He wasn't a doctor, and the reports had been made by doctors, but he could read between the lines. Take each little variation on its own and it was meaningless. A slightly faster respiration, a degree rise in the normal temperature, a trifling difference in tooth structure and an oddity about the shape of the skull. They hadn't been able to dissect him, but the X-rays showed only minor variations, and urine and saliva tests were near enough normal to arouse no comment. No comment and no suspicion.

But how could it be otherwise? If Thirty-two were alien, then he would have to have so near a normal, human metabolism as to make no difference. If not, then he would have died long ago. Died from the atmosphere, the environment or from plain starvation. In order to eat Terrestrial food he would have to have a metabolism very near to that of a man. So near that there could be no obvious differences, nothing to prove that he was other than a demented native of the planet.

And perhaps that is just what he was. Only . . . ?

Only how could a man suddenly appear as if from thin air? The farmer had stated that he had found him in the middle of a corn field. He had been naked, and later search had found no signs of discarded clothing. Assuming that he was normal, then he

would have had someone asking after him. Assuming that he was normal and healthy, then he would have had a military record, which meant fingerprints. Fingerprints? Metinck scowled at the space where they should have been. Only smudges showed against the white card, totally different from the normal whorls and curves. And Heron had said that he'd claimed to be a man from space, from some other world. A man somehow dumped on Earth.

But Heron, obviously, had lied. There was no record of Thirty-two ever having spoken other than gibberish, so how did Heron know? Obviously, he had been needling Metinck, trying to raise a cheap laugh at his expense by pulling a gag as weak as it was childish. Or was he?

Metinck lit another cigarette and tried to control the pounding of his heart. The nights were long in Denehaven, and maybe the nurse had actually spoken to Thirty-two. Maybe Heron had grown curious and had asked some questions and received some answers. He wouldn't believe them, naturally; who could believe a nut? He would have ignored them, laughed about it with Jolson and probably forgotten all about it until now. Now he had dragged it out to arouse Metinck's curiosity, or maybe was trying a complex form of hazing. What-

ever it was, it didn't matter. Metinck had stolen a look at the files and he had more to go on than Heron's gossip.

And Metinck had imagination. Maybe Thirty-two was a normal nut, but then again maybe he wasn't. He was different, that was certain, and if he had spoken to Heron . . .

What secrets would a man from space have in his possession? What would they be worth to a man who could learn them?

Metinck intended to find out.

To replace the file was easy. To arrange a swap of duty-sectors with Heron was easier still. Privately, Heron chuckled at the success of his plan, and Metinck, though he guessed what the other was thinking, acted his part. Heron had imagination, only in a limited degree. Let him stare at his pin-ups. Metinck was after the big money. At the first opportunity he spoke to Thirty-two.

It was at night. Metinck was still on the graveyard shift, and on his way from answering a call he stopped by Thirty-two's cell. The peephole showed him nothing, just a shape lying on the thin mattress, a shape which stirred as he opened the door and stepped into the cell.

"Relax." Metinck didn't want to raise his voice. "I'm a friend. You all right?"

A thin starlight came through the window, reflecting from slanting eyes set in an oddly shaped skull. Almost oriental that skull, but with a thick growth of dark hair and a white, almost translucent skin. Beneath a thin, high-bridged nose a wide mouth made a lipless slit above a receding chin. Metinck snapped on his flashlight for a better look and pupils contracted in the staring eyes. A long-fingered hand came up to shield the face against the light and fell again as Metinck switched it off.

"No need to be scared," said Metinck. "I just looked in to see if you were all right. Anything you need?"

No answer.

"I know how it is," said Metinck. "That Heron must have treated you pretty rough, but you don't have to be afraid of me." He stepped closer. "I'm your pal, understand? I know all about it, about you coming from up there." He jerked a thumb towards the roof. "Want to tell me about it?"

He might as well have spoken to the brick wall. Thirty-two just stared at him with those slanting eyes. Metinck caught himself on the verge of anger. He was rushing things and spoiling the whole deal. Naturally, the guy was scared; who wouldn't be with someone bursting in during the middle of the night? He probably thought that Metinck

was like Heron, and was cagey to open up. It would take time and patience to wear him down, time to convince him that he had a friend, and patience to persuade him to do something about it. But it would come in the end, Metinck was sure of it.

Only it was a long time coming.

Men believe what they want to believe, and Metinck was the victim of his own wishful thinking. The rewards, should Thirty-two turn out to be an alien from space, were too great for him to want to believe anything else. Space flight, different technologies, new means of communication, a thousand money-making inventions, and all his if only Thirty-two would talk. The trick was to make him talk.

Metinck tried everything he could think of, and then borrowed new ideas. He got into the habit of regular nightly visits and would sit and talk for as long as he dared. He gave Thirty-two small presents, cigarettes, candy, comic books and magazines, all bought with his own money, all put down as an investment against the future. The cigarettes weren't wasted. Thirty-two didn't use them, so Metinck did; but the candy and books and other stuff were lost to him for good. And time passed, and still Thirty-two didn't talk.

"Listen," said Metinck one night, his voice harsh with desperation. "You've got to break

down. You've got to open up. Damn it, you've been here for ten years now and a dumb kid would have learned the language in that time." He jerked his thumb towards the window and the stars beyond. "Don't you want to get out of here? Don't you want to get back home?"

Was it imagination, or did the eyes alter in some subtle way?

"Home," repeated Metinck. "I don't know where it is, or how to get there, but you do, and you could tell me. You can trust me, I'm your friend. I want to help you." He fought to control the anger boiling within him. Damn nut! Couldn't he see that Metinck was sincere? He gestured towards the stars again. "Don't you want to get out of here? Do you want to stay in this cell for the rest of your life, living like a dog until you pass out and they cut you up? Is that what you want?"

If Thirty-two understood, he made no sign. He just sat as he always sat, blankets hunched up to his chin, his slanting eyes unwinking in the starlight. It was those eyes which drove the nurse to desperation. He had seen too many of the insane not to be able to read the signs. Thirty-two didn't have crazy eyes. Strange eyes, yes, but not crazy. They held intelligence and awareness. Too much awareness. Metinck would have staked his life on the fact

that Thirty-two could understand everything he said.

And, though he didn't know it, that was exactly what he was doing.

Denehaven was a dead end, but it had rules and drew lines, tenuous though those lines might be. The rules were a matter of simple self-protection, not charity. There is an occupational hazard among those who are thrown into too-close contact with the insane. The weak and unstable tend to become contaminated by the very sickness they are trying to alleviate so that, without knowing it, they drift from normality into the twilight world of irrationality. And the overpowering depression which is the hallmark of the insane is contagious.

Denehaven had no bright recreation rooms for the staff, no organized amusements, nothing to relieve the almost tangible misery of the patients. But it did have a Director, a highly efficient grapevine and a fanatical desire to retain what it had. Waiting in the Director's office, Metinck wondered why the old man had sent for him. He wasn't kept long in doubt.

"Sit down, Metinck." The Director, a thin-faced doctor-politician who held his office by virtue of having useful connections, gestured towards a chair. He lit a cigar, taking his time

about it, then stared at the nurse through a cloud of smoke. "You've been with us close on three months," he said abruptly. "Like it?"

As a question it was a waste of words. There could be only one honest answer. Metinck shrugged, produced a cigarette and lit it.

"I'm going to be blunt, Metinck." If the Director didn't like the discourtesy of the nurse, he didn't show it. "You're useful here, I'll admit that, but there are some things we simply cannot tolerate. This business with Thirty-two, for example."

"Well?" Metinck relaxed a little; Thirty-two was about the only patient in his charge he'd treated like a human being.

"I've been hearing things." The Director stared at the tip of his cigar. "Things like late-night visits for no apparent reason, gifts of candy and books, things like that." His eyes, bagged and yellow but remarkably shrewd, lifted and stared at the nurse. "Unusual behaviour from a nurse to a patient. You agree?"

"I feel sorry for the guy." It was weak, and Metinck knew it, but it was the best he could do. "I figured that I'd try and cheer him up a little."

"Commendable, if true," said the Director drily. "Unfortunately there seems to be no apparent reason why you should favour one patient more than

another." He examined his cigar again, he was a man who hated to stare anyone in the eyes. "I don't want to hear that you've been seeing Thirty-two again. I've arranged for a change of duty for you, and there will be no reason for you to have any contact with that particular patient again." His eyes lifted. "Understand?"

"No." Metinck felt himself tighten with anger. "Has he made any complaint?"

"I'm making the complaint." The Director frowned as ash fell from his cigar. "We've enough patients here as it is without wanting more. You're getting too close an affinity with Thirty-two, let's leave it at that. See him again and you get fired. Stick to the rules and you've got a job for as long as you want." He rose, signalling dismissal. "That will be all."

It was too much. Outside the office, Metinck felt himself tremble with anger. For a moment he had a wild vision of going back and beating the Director to within an inch of his life, clenching his hands at the imagined impact of bone on flesh. He resisted the temptation. With a fortune within his grasp he couldn't afford to satisfy his emotions. He walked away from the office, his mind humming with plans.

The old coot had meant what he said, Metinck knew that. Once outside Thirty-two would be

lost to him for ever. He had to stay inside, but equally so he had to see Thirty-two again. Passing the canteen, he bumped into Heron and grabbed at the man's arm.

"Thirty-two," he gritted. "You said that he talked to you. Did he?"

"You crazy?" Heron tugged at his arm. "What's the big idea? Let go of me."

"You said that he was a man from space." Metinck's fingers dug deeper into yielding flesh. "Did he say that?" His face was very close to Heron's, his voice strained and harsh.

"I . . ." Heron stared at Metinck, recognized what he saw and suddenly became cautious. "Sure," he said weakly. "Anything you want."

"You mean he said that?"

"I guess so." Heron jerked his arm from Metinck's grip. "What's got into you?"

"Nothing." Metinck realized that he had almost said too much. Let Heron get a hint of the money waiting to be picked up and he'd want to move in. And he knew more about Thirty-two than Metinck did, at least the patient had spoken to him, which he had never done to his new friend. But it proved one thing, he could speak, and he was going to speak again. He had to. And he would do it soon.

Heron rubbed his bruised arm and glowered after Metinck as he walked away.

"Crazy," he muttered. "Real crazy!"

He went in search of Jolson.

It was dim in the corridor, a pale, blue-lit dimness from the shaded bulbs high against the ceiling. It was late, well into the early hours, but late as it was, the wing was not quiet. From behind the rows of doors, each with their peep-window, came the mutterings and sighs, the restless movements and groans of those who fought a lonely battle with their private ghosts. Men who were convinced that they trembled on the edge of violent death, men who had nothing to live for but who were too far sunk in depression to take the obvious way out, others who twitched and jerked and stared wide-eyed at the stars beyond their windows.

Metinck moved softly down the corridor, his rubber-soled shoes making no sound. He was tense, conscious of the risk he was taking but knowing no other way to gain his objective. The Director had been as good as his word and had put Metinck on the day-shift. For two days the nurse had tried to contact Thirty-two and had failed. Two days in which his fevered imagination had built dream-palace after dream-palace,

all to be his with the secrets he would learn from the alien.

If he would only talk.

But tonight he would talk, Metinck was convinced of that. If he had spoken to Heron, then that was proof that the alien was no dummy. If he had spoken to one man, then he could speak to another. All it required was a little persuasion.

The lock clicked and Metinck slipped into the familiar cell. On the cot the alien stirred, rising to sit as he always sat, his eyes as alert and as watchful as ever.

"It's me." Metinck remembered to keep his voice low. "Sorry I couldn't make it before, but I came as soon as I could." He rummaged in his pockets. "Here, I've brought you some candy."

He held out some chocolate bars and Thirty-two took them as he always did, with a smooth, gliding motion of his long-fingered hand, hiding them beneath his blankets.

"You're scared," said Metinck. He came closer and sat on the single chair beside the bed. "But you shouldn't be scared. Not of me. Of Heron, maybe, and the others, but not of me. I want to help you."

Silence and the watchful eyes.

"You've got to understand," said Metinck. "You can talk, I know that, and you've got to understand." He paused, rehearsing his lie. "They're going to cut

you up. They're going to slip you something in your food and when you pass out they're going to take you down to the labs and see what makes you tick. They're curious about you, they know you aren't normal and they want to know just how different you are. I've come to warn you because I'm your friend."

Was it imagination or did the eyes hold a growing terror?

"I can save you." Metinck edged closer. "I will save you if you help me to. All you have to do is to open up and tell me the truth."

He licked his lips, wanting to shout but fighting to keep his voice under control. Damn dummy! Couldn't he see what was good for him?

"I know you came from up there." Metinck's thumb stabbed towards the ceiling. "That means you've got knowledge we haven't, and if you'll give me that knowledge I'll save you. I promise that if you open up and tell me what I want to know I won't let them hurt you." His voice became a snarl. "But if you don't talk, then there's nothing I can do for you. Understand?"

This time there could be no doubt as to the terror in the eyes. Confidently, Metinck waited for him to speak. But he didn't speak. Thirty-two did nothing but sit and stare, the starlight glinting from his eyes, his body

rigid beneath the blankets. Metinck felt rage boiling within him, the desperate, helpless rage of a man who wants something someone else refuses to give. And it was such a little thing. Just a few words, a few simple diagrams, a new concept, a little co-operation. Such a little thing for the alien to do for his friend, and yet to Metinck it meant so much. Wealth, fame, honour, security, all the things he had craved all his life. All his if the alien would speak. Metinck now had no doubt that Thirty-two was an alien.

"Talk." The nurse rose from the chair and leaned over the bed. "You talked to Heron, didn't you? Well, now you can talk to me." He reached out and gripped a soft shoulder, his fingers digging into the flesh. Thirty-two recoiled, his eyes huge in the starlight. Metinck laughed, the breath rasping from his open mouth. "Hurts, doesn't it? You'll be hurt a lot more if you don't open up." Anger boiled within him. "Talk, damn you! Talk!"

Thirty-two didn't talk.

It was impossible. It was unbelievable that anyone could be so stubborn and so ungrateful. Metinck had risked a lot in order to be kind to the patient, had bought him presents out of his own money, had been gentle with him and had treated him as a child. Even now he was risking

his job just to be near him, to warn him, and yet, despite all that, Thirty-two still wouldn't co-operate. It was enough to drive a normal man to desperation.

Metinck wasn't normal. He had lived with a dream for too long and now he simply couldn't live without it. He was convinced that Thirty-two held the answer to his own personal happiness, and was withholding that answer from sheer stubbornness. And this would be his last chance, Metinck knew that. The answer had to be learned now or lost for ever.

"Talk!" The command echoed from the walls. "Damn you, talk!" His elbow swung sharply against the body of the man on the bed. The flat of his hand rang against a cheek, leaving ugly red weals against the white skin. Above the weals the oddly slanting eyes seemed to grow even larger, more brilliant, more aware. Metinck recognized only the awareness.

"I know you can talk," he panted. "Heron told me. Damn it, if you can talk to him then you can talk to me." His palm swung again. "Talk, you alien swine! Talk! Talk!"

Everything was forgotten now but the one essential. The need for silence, the need for caution and restraint, all had gone. Metinck had only one emotion, anger. Only one object, to make the alien talk. Not for a moment did

he consider the fact that perhaps Heron had lied. Thirty-two was going to talk; he had to.

If he didn't then Metinck would kill him.

Jolson frowned down at his cards, lifted a black ten and put it neatly on a red Jack. From the wall a buzzer sounded and he glanced upwards, frowned even deeper and looked down at his cards. Heron put down his magazine, glanced at the board and pursed his lips.

"Twenty-five," he said. "Again?"

"Let him wait." Jolson grunted as the buzzer fell silent. "Any news of the new boy yet?"

"Not that I know of." Heron found a half-smoked cigarette, delicately crimped the dead ash from the end, stuck it into his mouth and lit it. "Two more days and I'm going up to the Director. I can't see why we should do extra work without extra pay."

"You'll be wasting your time." Jolson looked thoughtful. "You figure on any trouble?"

"Trouble?" Heron squinted through a cloud of smoke. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"You know right enough," said Jolson. "It was your idea in the first place. I just carried the ball." He sounded worried. "Maybe we should forget about it

when the new man comes. We don't want to take any chances."

"A gag; could I help it that he took it seriously?" Heron stared down at his magazine then looked up again. "Anyway, who would believe him?"

"He did you," reminded Jolson. "You should have told him it was just a joke."

"And get my jaw broken?" Heron shook his head. "The guy was crazy. I wasn't going to take any chances." He glanced at the magazine again but found it devoid of its usual interest. "You know," he said thoughtfully, "maybe the gag's on us all the time. I've been thinking about it, and the more I think the more it all seems to hang together. Just suppose that I managed to hit the target dead centre? Suppose that I was right all the time?"

"In saying that Thirty-two was a man from space?" Jolson snorted his contempt. "I know that gag, remember?"

"But supposing that it wasn't a gag?" Heron frowned at smoke. "I managed to sneak a look at the files a couple of days ago and there's something queer about him, and that's a fact. The way he was found, everything. Just supposing that he really did come from space somewhere?"

"Eyewash!" Jolson was annoyed. "If he did, then he could tell us, couldn't he? Anyway, he'd be too intelligent to

stay in this dump." He slapped down a card with unnecessary vigour.

"I wonder." Heron was thoughtful. "Suppose it was you, say, or me, and we were stranded on an island somewhere. Suppose that we were just dumped there in the middle of the night, naked and without anyone seeing us. Suppose that that island had head-hunters on it, or cannibals."

"Suppose you shut up and let me get on with the game?" Jolson scowled at his cards. "That's crazy talk."

"It's logical argument." Heron refused to be put off. "Suppose all that, what would you do?"

"Talk to them, make signs, anything." Jolson looked up from his cards. "Simple."

"Maybe." Heron squinted at the tip of his cigarette. "So you'd talk to them and tell them all about civilization. You'd act the big shot and shoot off your mouth. Then, maybe, they'd ask you to prove it. Then?"

"I'd prove it." Jolson was emphatic.

"How?" Heron was intent. "You'd tell them about radio, how would you prove that? You'd tell them about television, juke boxes and automobiles. You'd tell them of skyscrapers and elevators and airplanes. You might even talk about atomic piles and electricity, and antibiotics and synthetics. You could

talk for a long time about the things you had in the place you came from, but that's all you could do, talk. When it came to proving it, then that's something else."

"I don't see it," protested Jolson. He was interested despite himself. Heron had set a problem and he loved problems, that's why he played solitaire. "I could build things and . . ." His voice trailed into silence as he saw what Heron was getting at.

For proving it was the one thing neither he nor anyone else could do. A specialist, maybe, but even he would have a hard time. For how can anyone build a modern civilization from scratch? How to build an airplane from sand and palm trees, a radio from vines and stones? Talking wouldn't be enough; anyone could talk.

"A smart man would shut his mouth," said Heron softly. "He'd know that he was beaten before he started, so he wouldn't even start. He'd just take things as they came."

Jolson shivered. "A hell of a position to be in."

"It might not be so bad," pointed out Heron. "He'd be fed, washed, clothed and housed and, when you come down to it, what more does any intelligent man want? And maybe he could afford to wait."

"In this place?" Jolson was incredulous.

"To him, it might not seem so bad. Regular food, no work, nothing to do but sit and think and pass the time. And, as I said, maybe he can afford to wait."

"But he'd talk," pointed out Jolson. "He'd learn how to do that."

"If he could," admitted Heron. But suppose that something had been done to him so that he couldn't talk? Or what if he just wasn't able to talk in the same way as the natives?" He sat upright, a startled expression on his face. "I wonder if Metinck thought of that?"

The buzzer cut short Jolson's answer; it also brought him to his senses.

"If you're smart you'll forget it," he advised. "Start talking that way and you'll be in trouble. They still can't figure out how Metinck came to be wandering around in the middle of the night yelling like crazy. The Director thought Thirty-two might have had something to do with it, but he was locked in, sleeping cosy as a baby. And there was Metinck walking around screaming his head off about having found all the money in the world and not being able to touch it because he'd killed the one man who could have given it to him." He shook his

head. "And that was the funniest part of the whole thing. He hadn't killed anybody."

"Crazy," said Heron, remembering his arm. "Real crazy."

"He's crazy all right," agreed Jolson. "He's a case for the book. But why should he think that he'd killed Thirty-two when he hadn't? He was positive about it, too, and yet when we checked up nothing had happened. Thirty-two was just as he always is, calm, quiet, not bothering no one. I'd almost swear that he was laughing at us, if he wasn't a nut that is, so why all the fuss? I . . ." Jolson frowned as the buzzer sounded again and he rose

to his feet sighing with annoyance.

"You'd think that a man who's been through the mill himself would have more consideration," he grumbled. "Three times tonight already, and each time he wants me to join him in some crazy scheme to find another alien." He snorted. "That gag backfired all right."

"If it was a gag," said Heron thoughtfully.

"What?"

"Nothing." Heron glanced up at the buzzer. "Just take it easy with him, uh? He'll learn."

"Sure," said Jolson grimly. "But when?"

Forecast

Logan was a peculiar planet. On the face of it it was a nice, habitable, Earthtype planet ideally suitable for colonization. And it was colonized, but the colonists had no choice in the matter. They had to stay and they hated it, for Logan, despite appearances, was **UNFIT FOR HUMANS**. In his own smooth, inimitable style, J. T. McIntosh tells just why Logan was hated by those forced to live there, why they had to go there in the first place and what they hoped to do about the system in general and Logan in particular.

TOPSIDE, by Philip E. High, tells of the remnants of humanity, dead for a thousand years, now resurrected to find themselves aliens on their own planet.

NIGHTRIDE AND SUNRISE, by Jerome Bixby, is a story of a journey in space and what happened when the extra, invisible passenger made itself felt. The passenger with the six-letter name.

OUT OF REACH, by Brian W. Aldiss, is a bitter-sweet tale of a dream which wasn't, about a paradise-like world which no one doubted existed, but which no one knew how to find.

MOTHER OF INVENTION, by A. Bertram Chandler, probes what could happen if a man went back in time. His motives were harmless enough—but not what he took with him.

A KIND OF IMMORTALITY, by Edward Mackin, deals with a new kind of punishment and its unforeseeable side-effect.



Songs of Summer

SONGS OF SUMMER

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

*He came from the past, hard, ruthless,
fired with a dream. To the people of the
future he was a menace—but they gave
him his dream. Literally.*

1. Kennon

I WAS ON MY WAY TO TAKE part in the Singing, and to claim Corilann's promise. I was crossing the great open field when suddenly the man appeared, the man named Chester Dugan. He seemed to drop out of the sky.

I watched him stagger for a moment or two. I did not know where he had come from so suddenly, or why he was here. He was short—shorter than any of us—fat in an unpleasant way, with wrinkles on his face and an unshaven growth of beard. I was anxious to get on to the Singing, and so I allowed him to fall to the ground and kept moving. But he

called to me, in a barbarous and corrupt tongue which I could recognize as our language only with difficulty.

"Hey, you," he called to me. "Give me a hand, will you?"

He seemed to be in difficulties, so I walked over to him and helped him to his feet. He was panting, and appeared almost in a state of shock. Once I saw he was steady on his feet, and seemed to have no further need of me, I began to walk away from him, since I was anxious to get on to the Singing and did not wish to meddle with this man's affairs. Last year was the first time I attended the Singing at Dandrin's, and I enjoyed it very much. It

was then that Corilann had promised herself. I was anxious to get on.

But he called to me. "Don't leave me here!" he shouted. "Hey, you can't just walk away like that! Help me!"

I turned and went back. He was dressed strangely, in ugly, ill-arranged tight clothes, and he was walking in little circles, trying to adjust his equilibrium. "Where am I?" he asked me.

"Earth, of course," I told him.

"No," he said harshly. "I don't mean that, idiot. Where, on Earth?"

The concept had no meaning for me. Where, on Earth, indeed? Here, was all I knew—the great plain between my home and Dandrin's, where the Singing is held. I began to feel uneasy. This man seemed badly sick, and I did not know how to handle him. I felt thankful that I was going to the Singing; had I been alone, I never would have been able to deal with him. I realized I was not as self-sufficient as I thought I was.

"I am going to the Singing," I told him. "Are you?"

"I'm not going anywhere till you tell me where I am and how I got here. What's your name?"

"My name is Kennon. You are crossing the great plain on your way to the home of Dandrin, where we are going to have the Singing, for it is summer. Come; I'm anxious to get there. Walk with me, if you wish."

I started to walk away a second time, and this time he began to follow me. We walked along silently for a while.

"Answer me, Kennon," he said after a hundred paces or so. "Ten seconds ago I was in New York; now I'm here. How far am I from New York?"

"What is New York?" I asked. At this he showed great signs of anger and impatience, and I began to feel quite worried.

"Where'd you escape from?" he shouted. "You never heard of New York? You never heard of *New York*? New York," he said, "is a city of some eight million people, located on the Atlantic Ocean, on the east coast of the United States of America. Now tell me you haven't heard of that!"

"What is a city?" I asked, very much confused. At this he grew very angry. He threw his arms in the air wildly.

"Let us walk more quickly," I said. I saw now that I was obviously incapable of dealing with this man, and I was anxious to get on to the Singing—where

perhaps Dandrin, or the other old ones, would be able to understand him. He continued to ask me questions as we walked, but I'm afraid I was not very helpful.

2. *Chester Dugan*

I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED or how; all I know is I got here. There doesn't seem to be any way back, either, but I don't care; I've got a good thing here and I'm going to show these nitwits who's boss.

Last thing I knew, I was getting into a subway; there was an explosion and a blinding flash of light, and before I could see what was happening I blanked out and somehow got here. I landed in a big open field with absolutely nothing around. It took a few minutes to get over the shock. I think I fell down; I'm not sure. It's not like me, but this was something out of the ordinary and I might have lost my balance.

Anyway, I recovered almost immediately and looked around, and saw this kid in loose flowing robes, walking quickly across the field not too far away. I yelled to him when I saw he didn't intend to come over to me. He came over

and gave me a hand, and then started to walk away again, calm as you please. I had to call him back. He seemed a little reluctant.

I tried to get him to tell me where we were, but he played dumb. Didn't know where we were, didn't know where New York was, didn't even know what a city was—or so he said. I would have thought he was crazy, except that I didn't know what had happened to me; for that matter, I might have been the crazy one and not him.

I saw I wasn't making much headway with him, so I gave up. All he would tell me was that he was on his way to the Singing, and the way he said it there was no doubt about the capital S. He said there would be men there who could help me. To this day I don't know how I got here. Even after I spoke and asked around, no one could tell me how I could step into a subway train in 1956 and come out in an open field somewhere around the 35th Century.

But I'm here, that's all that matters. And whatever went before is down the drain now. Whatever deals I was working on back in 1956 are dead and buried now; that is where I'm stuck, for reasons I don't get, and here's where I'll have to make my

pile. All over again—me, Dugan, starting from scratch. But I'll do it. I'm doing it.

After this kid Kennon and I had plodded across the fields for a while, I heard the sound of voices. By now it was getting towards nightfall. I forgot to mention that it was getting along toward the end of November back in 1956, but the weather here was nice and summery. There was a pleasant tang of something in the air that I had never noticed in New York's air, or the soup they called air back then.

The sound of the singing grew louder as we approached, but as soon as we got within sight they all stopped immediately.

They were sitting in a big circle, twenty or thirty of them, dressed in light, airy clothing. They all turned to look at me as we got near.

I got the feeling they were all looking into my mind.

The silence lasted a few minutes, and then they began to sing again. A tall, thin kid was leading them, and they were responding to what he sang. They ignored me. I let them continue until I formed a plan; I don't believe in rushing into things without knowing exactly what I'm doing.

I waited till the singing quieted down a bit, and then I yelled: "Stop!" I stepped forward into the middle of the ring.

"My name is Dugan," I said, loud, clear and slow. "Chester Dugan. I don't know how I got here, and I don't know where I am, but I mean to stay here a while. Who's the chief around here?"

They looked at each other in a puzzled fashion and finally an old, thin-faced man stepped out of the circle. "My name is Dandrin," he said in a thin, dried little voice. "As the oldest here, I will speak for the people. Where do you come from?"

"That's just it," I said. "I came from New York City, United States of America, Planet Earth, the Universe. Don't any of those things mean anything to you?"

"They are names, of course," Dandrin said. "But I do not know what they are names of. New York City? United States of America? We have no such terms."

"Never heard of New York?" This was the same treatment I had gotten from that dumb kid Kennon, and I didn't like it. "New York is the biggest city

in the world, and the United States is the richest country."

I heard hushed mumbles go around the circle. Dandrin smiled.

"I think I see now," he said. "Cities, countries." He looked at me in a strange way. "Tell me," he said. "Just *when* are you from?"

That shook me. "Nineteen hundred and fifty-six," I said. And here, I'll admit, I began to get worried.

"This is the 35th Century," he said calmly. "At least, so we think. We lost count during the Bombing Years. But come, Chester Dugan; we are interrupting the Singing with our talk. Let us go aside and talk, while the others can sing."

He led me off to one side and explained things to me. Civilization had broken up during a tremendous atomic war. These people were the survivors, the dregs. There were no cities and not even small towns. People lived in groups of twos and threes here and there, and didn't come together very often. They didn't even *like* to get together, except during the summer. Then they would gather at the home of some old man—usually Dandrin; everyone would meet, and sing for a while, and then go home.

Apparently, there were only a few thousand people in all of America. They lived widely scattered, and there was no business, or trade, or culture, or anything else. Just little clumps of people living by themselves, farming a little and singing, and not doing much else. As the old man talked I began to rub my hands together—mentally, of course. All sorts of plans were forming in my head.

He didn't have any idea how I had gotten here, and neither did I; I still don't. I think it just must have been a one-in-a-trillion fluke, a flaw in space or something. I just stepped through at the precise instant and wound up at that open field. But Chester Dugan can't worry about things he doesn't understand. I just accept them.

I saw a big future for myself here, with my knowledge of 20th Century business methods. The first thing, obviously, was to re-establish villages. The way they had things arranged now, there really wasn't any civilization. Once I had things started, I could begin reviving other things that these decadent people had lost: money, entertainment, sports, business. Once we got machinery going, we'd be set. We'd start working on a city, and begin expanding. I thanked whoever it

was had dropped me here. This was a golden opportunity for me. These people would be putty in my hands.

3. *Corilann*

IT WAS WITH KENNON'S APPROVAL that I did it. Right after the Singing ended for that evening, Dugan came over to me and I could tell from the tone of his conversation that he wanted me for the night. I had already promised myself to Kennon, but Dugan seemed so insistent that I asked Kennon to release me for this one evening, and he did. He didn't mind.

It was strange the way Dugan went about asking me. He never came right out and said anything. I didn't like anything he did that night; and he's ugly.

He kept telling me: "Stay with me, baby; we're going places together." I didn't know what he meant.

The other women were very curious about it the next day. There are so few of us, that it's a novelty to sleep with someone new. They wanted to know how it had been. I told them I enjoyed it.

It was a lie; he was disgusting. But I went back to him the next

night, and the one after that, no matter what poor Kennon said. I couldn't help it, despite myself. There was just something about Dugan that drew me; I couldn't help it. But he was disgusting.

4. *Dandrin*

IT WAS STRANGE TO SEE THEM standing in neat, ordered, precise rows, they who had never known any order, any rules before, and Dugan was telling them what to do. The dawn of the day before, we had been free and alone, but since then Dugan had come.

He lined everybody up, and, as I sat in the shade and watched, he began explaining his plans. We tried so hard to understand what he meant. I remembered stories I had heard of the old ones, but I had never believed them until I saw Dugan in action.

"I can't understand you people," he shouted at us. "This whole rich world is sitting here waiting for you to walk out and grab it, and you sit around singing instead. Singing! You people are decadent, that's what you are. You need a government—a good, sturdy government—and I'm here to give it to you."

Kennon and some of the others had come to me that morning to find out what was going to happen. I urged them not to do anything, to listen to Dugan and do what he says. That way, I felt, we could eventually learn to understand him and deal with him in the proper manner. I confess that I was curious to see how he would react among us.

I said nothing when he gave orders that no one was to return home after the Singing. We were to stay here, he told us, and build a city. He was going to bring us all the advantages of the 20th Century.

And we listened to him patiently, all but Kennon. It was Kennon who had brought him here, poor young Kennon who had come here for the Singing and for Corilann. And it was Corilann whom Dugan had singled out for his own private property. Kennon had given his approval, the first night, thinking she would come back to him the next day. But she hadn't; she stayed with Dugan.

In a couple of days he had his city all planned and everything apportioned. I think the thought uppermost in everyone's mind was *why*: why does he want us to do these things? Why? We would have to give him time to carry out his plans; provided he did no

permanent harm, we would wait and see, and wonder why.

5. *Chester Dugan*

THIS CORILANN IS REALLY STACKED. Things were never like this back when! After Dandrin had told me where the unattached women were sitting, I looked them over and picked her. They were all worth a second look, but she was something special. I didn't know at the time that she was promised to Kennon, or I might not have started fooling around with her; I don't want to antagonize these people too much.

I'm afraid Kennon may be down on me a bit. I've taken his girl away, and I don't think he goes for my methods. I'll have to try some psychology on him. Maybe I'll make him my second-in-command.

The city is moving along nicely. There were 120 people at the Singing, and my figures show that fifteen were old people and the rest divided up pretty evenly; everyone is coupled off, and I've arranged the housing to fit the coupling. These people don't have children very often, but I'll fix that; I'll figure out some way of making things better for those with the most children, some sort

of incentive. The quicker we build up the population, the better things will be. I understand there's a wild tribe about five hundred miles to the north of here, maybe less (I still don't have any idea where *here* is) who still have some machines and things, and once we're all established I intend to send an expedition out to conquer the wild tribe and bring back the machines.

There's an idea; maybe I'll let Kennon lead the expedition. I'll be giving him a position of responsibility, and at the same time there's a chance he might get knocked off. That kid's going to cause trouble; I wish I hadn't taken his girl.

But it's too late to go back on it. Besides, I need a son, and quickly. If Corilann's baby is a girl, I don't know what I'll do. I can't carry on my dynasty without an heir.

There's another kid here that bothers me—Jubilain. He's not like the others; he's very frail and sensitive, and seems to get special treatment. He's the one who leads the singing. I haven't been able to get him to work on the construction yet, and I don't know if I'm going to be able to.

But otherwise everything is moving smoothly. I'm surprised

that old Dandrin doesn't object to what I'm doing. It's long since past the time when the Singing should have broken up, and everyone scattered, but they're all staying right here and working as if I was paying them.

Which I am, in a way. I'm bringing them the benefits of a great lost civilization, which I represent. Chester Dugan, the man from the past. I'm taking a bunch of nomads and turning them into a powerful city. So actually, everyone's profiting—the people, because of what I'm doing for them, and me. Me especially, because here I'm absolute top dog.

I'm worried about Corilann's baby, though. If it's a girl, that means a delay of a year or more before I can have my son, and even then it'll be at least ten years before he's of any use to me. I wonder what would happen if I took a second wife—Jarinne, for example. I watched her while she was stripped down for work yesterday and she looks even better than Corilann. These people don't seem to have any particular beliefs about marriage, anyway, and so I don't know if they'd mind. Then if Corilann had a girl, I might give her back to Kennon.

And that reminds me of another

thing—there's no religion here. I'm not much of a Godman myself, but I realize religion's a good thing for keeping people in line. I'll have to start thinking about getting a priesthood going, as soon as affairs are a little more settled here.

I didn't think it was so much work, organizing a civilization. But once I get it all set up, I can sit back and cool my heels for life. It's a pleasure working with these people. I just can't wait till everything is moving by itself. I've gotten further in two months here than I did in forty years there. It just goes to show—you need a powerful man to keep civilization alive. And Chester Dugan is just the man these people needed.

6. Kennon

CORILANN HAS TOLD ME SHE WILL have a child by Dugan. This has made me sad, since it might have been my child she would be bearing instead. But I brought Dugan here myself, and so I suppose I am responsible. If I had not come to the Singing, he might have died in the great open field. But now it is too late for such thoughts.

Dugan forbids us to go home, now that the Singing is over. My

father is waiting for me at our home, and the hunting must be done before the winter comes, but Dugan forbids us to go home. Dandrin had to explain to me what "forbids" means; I still don't fully understand why or how one person can tell another person what to do. None of us really understands Dugan at all, not even Dandrin, I think. Dandrin is trying hardest to understand him, but Dugan is so completely alien to us that we do not see.

He has made us build what he calls a city—many houses close together. He says the advantage of this is that we may protect each other. But from what? We have no enemies. I have the feeling that Dugan understands us even less than we understand him. And I am anxious to go home for the autumn hunting, now that summer is almost over and the Singing is ended. I had hoped to bring Corilann back with me, but it is my own fault, and I must not be bitter.

Dugan has been very cold toward me. This is surprising, since it was I who brought him to the Singing. I think he is afraid I will try to take Corilann back; in any event, he seems to fear me and show anger towards me.

If I only understood!

7. Kennon

DUGAN HAS CERTAINLY GONE TOO far now. For the past week I have been trying to engage him in conversation, to find out what his motives are for doing all the things he is doing. Dandrin should be doing this, but Dandrin seems to have abdicated all responsibility in this matter and is content to sit idly by, watching all that happens. Dugan does not make him work because he is so old.

I do not understand Dugan at all. Yesterday he told me: "We will rule the world." What does he mean? *Rule*? Does he actually want to tell everyone who lives what he can do and what he cannot do? If all of the people of Dugan's time were like this, it is small wonder they destroyed everything. What if two people told the same man to do different things? What if they told each other to do things? My head reels at the thought of Dugan's world. People living together in masses, and telling each other what to do; it seems insane. I long to be back with my father for the hunting. I had hoped to bring him a daughter as well, but it seems this is not to be.

Dugan has offered me Jarinne as my wife. Jarinne says she has been with Dugan, and that Cori-

lann knows. Dandrin warns me not to accept Jarinne because it will anger Dugan. But if it will anger Dugan, why did he offer her to me? And—now it occurs to me—by what right does he offer me another person?

Jarinne is a fine woman. She could make me forget Corilann.

And then Dugan told me that soon there will be an expedition to the north; we will take weapons and conquer the wild men. Dugan has heard of the machines of the wild men, and he says he needs them for our city. I told him that I had to leave immediately to help my father with the hunting, that I have stayed here long enough. Others are saying the same thing—this summer the Singing has lasted too long.

Today I tried to leave. I gathered my friends and told them I was anxious to go home, and I asked Jarinne to come with me. She accepted, though she reminded me that she had been with Dugan. I told her I might be able to forget that. She said she knew it wouldn't matter to me if it had been anyone else (of course not; why should it?) but that I might object because it had been Dugan. I said goodbye to Corilann, who now is swollen with Dugan's child; she cried a little.

And then I started to leave. I did not talk to Dandrin, for I was afraid he would persuade me not to go. I opened the gate that Dugan has just put up, and started to leave.

Suddenly Dugan appeared. "Where do you think you're going?" he asked, in his hard, cold rasp of a voice. "Pulling out?"

"I have told you," I said quietly, "it is time to help my father with the hunting. I cannot stay in your city any longer." I moved past him and Jarinne followed. But he ran around in front of me.

"No one leaves here, understand?" He waved his closed hand in front of me. "We can't build a city if you take off when you want to."

"But I must go," I said. "You have detained me here long enough." I started to walk on, and suddenly he hit me with his closed hand and knocked me down.

I went sprawling over the ground, and I felt blood on my face from where he had hurt my nose. People all around were watching. I got up slowly. I am bigger and much stronger than Dugan, but it had never occurred to me that one person might hit

another person. But this is one of the many things that has come to our world.

I was not so unhappy for myself; pain soon ceases. But Jubilain the Singer was watching when he hit me, and such sights should be kept from Singers. They are not like the rest of us. I am afraid Jubilain has been seriously disturbed by the sight.

After he had knocked me down, Dugan walked away. I got up and went back inside the gate. I do not want to leave now. I must talk to Dandrin. Something must be done.

8. *Jubilain*

SUMMER TO AUTUMN TO EVERY OLD everyone, sing winter to quiet to baby fall down. My head head hurts. My my hurts head. Bloody was Kennon.

Kennon was bloody and Dugan was angry and summer to autumn to.

Jubilain is very sad. My head hurts. Dugan hit Kennon in the face. With his hand, his hand hand rolled up in a ball Dugan hit Kennon. Outside the gates. Consider the gates. Consider.

They have spoiled the song. How can I sing when Dugan hits

Kennon? My head hurts. Sing summer to autumn, sing every old everyone. It is good that the summer is ending, for the songs are over. How can I sing? Bloody was Kennon.

Jubilain's head hurts. It did not hurt before did not hurt. I could sing before. Summer to autumn to every old everyone. Corilann's belly is big with Dugan, and Jubilain's head hurts. Will there be more Dugans?

And more Kennons. No more Jubilains. No more songs. The songs of summer are silent and slippery. My head hurts. Hurts hurts hurts. I can sing no more. Nonononononono.

9. *Dandrin*

THIS IS TRAGIC. I AM AN OLD FOOL.

I have been sitting in the shade, like the dried old man I am, while Dugan has destroyed us. Today he struck a man—Kennon. Kennon, whom he has mis-treated from the start. Poor Kennon. Dugan has brought strife to us, now, along with his city and his gates.

But that is not the worst of it. Jubilain watched the whole thing, and we have lost our Singer.

Jubilain simply was unable to assimilate the incident. A Singer's mind is not like our minds; it is a delicate, sensitive instrument. But it cannot comprehend violence. Our Singer has gone mad; there will be no more songs.

We must destroy Dugan. It is sad that we must come to his level and talk of destroying, but it is so. Now he is going to bring us warfare, and that is a gift we do not need. The fierce men of the north will prove strong adversaries for a people that has not fought for a thousand years. Why could we not have been left to ourselves? We were happy and peaceful people, and now we must talk of destroying.

I know the way to do it, too. If only my mind is strong enough, if only it has not dried in the sun during the years, I can lead the way. If I can link with Kennon, and Kennon with Jarinne, and Jarinne with Corilann, and Corilann with——

If we can link, we can do it. Dugan must go. And this is the best way; this way we can dispose of him and still remain human beings.

I am an old fool. But perhaps this dried old brain still is good for something. If I can link with Kennon——

10. *Chester Dugan*

ALL RESISTANCE HAS CRUMBLLED now. I'm set up for life—Chester Dugan, ruler of the world. It's not much of a world, true enough, but what the hell. It's mine.

It's amazing how all the grumbling has stopped. Even Kennon has given in—in fact, he's become my most valuable man, since that time I had to belt him. It was too bad, I guess, to ruin such a nice nose, but I couldn't have him walking off that way.

He's going to lead the expedition to the north tomorrow, and he's leaving Jarinne here. That's good. Corilann is busy with her baby, and I think I need a little variety anyway. Good-looking kid Corilann had; takes after his old man. It's amazing how everything is working out.

I hope to get electricity going soon, but I'm not too sure. The stream here is kind of weak, and maybe we'll have to throw up a dam first. In fact, I'm sure of it. I'll speak to Kennon about it before he leaves.

This business of rebuilding a civilization from scratch has its rewards. God, am I lean! I've lost all that roll of fat I was carrying around. I suppose part of the reason is that there's no

beer here, yet—but I'll get to that soon enough. Everything in due time. First, I want to see what Kennon brings back from the north. I hope he doesn't ruin anything by ripping it out. Wouldn't it be nice to find a hydraulic press or a generator or stuff like that? And with my luck, we probably will.

Maybe we'll do without religion a little while longer. I spoke to Dandrin about it, but he didn't seem to go for the idea of being priest. I might just take over that job myself, once things get straightened out. I'd like to work out some sort of heating system before the winter gets here. I've figured out that we're somewhere in New Jersey or Pennsylvania, and it'll get pretty cold here unless things have changed. (Could the barbarian city to the north be New York? Sounds reasonable.)

It's funny the way everyone lies down and says yes when I tell them to do something. These people have no guts, that's their trouble. One good thing about civilization—you have to have guts to last. I'll put guts in these people, all right. I'll probably be remembered for centuries and centuries. Maybe they'll think of me as a sort of messiah in the far future when everything's

blurred. Why not? I came to them out of the clouds, didn't I? From heaven.

Messiah Dugan! Lawsy-me, if they could only see me now!

I still can't get over the way everything is moving. It's almost like a dream. By next spring we'll have a respectable little city here, practically overnight. And we can hold a super-special Singing next summer and snaffle in the folks from all around.

Too bad about that kid Jubilain, by the way; he's really gone off his nut. But I always thought he was a little way there anyway. Maybe I'll teach them some of the old songs myself. It'll help to make me popular here. Although, come to think of it, I'm pretty popular now. They're all smiling at me all the time.

11.

"Kennon? Kennon? Hear me?"

"I hear you, Dandrin. I'll get Jarinne."

"Here I am. Corilann?"

"Here, Jarinne. And pulling hard. Let's try to get Onnar."

"Pull hard!"

"Onnar in." "And Jekkaman."

"Hello, Dandrin."

"Hello."

"All here?"

"One hundred twenty."

"Tight now." "We're right tight."

"Let's get started, then. All together."

"Hello? Hello, Dugan. Listen to us, Dugan. Listen to us. Listen to us. Hold on tight! Listen to us, Dugan."

"Open up all the way, now."

"Are you listening, Dugan?"

12.

Dandrin plus Kennon plus Jarinne plus Corilann plus n

I THINK WE'LL BE ABLE TO HOLD together indefinitely, and so it can be said that the coming of Dugan was an incredible stroke of luck for us. This new blending is infinitely better than trying to make contact over thousands of miles!

Certainly we'll have to maintain this *gestalt* (useful word; I found it in Dugan's mind when I entered) until after Dugan's death. He's peacefully dreaming now, dreaming of who knows what conquests and battles and expansions, and I don't think he'll come out of it. He may live on in his dream for years, and I'll have

to hold together and sustain the illusion until he dies. I hope we're making him happy at last. He seems to have been a very unhappy man.

And just after I joined together, it occurred to me that we'd better stay this way indefinitely, just in case any more Dugans get thrown at us from the past. (Could it have been part of a Design? I wonder.) They must all have been like that back then. It's a fine thing that bomb was dropped.

We'll keep Dugan's city, of course. He did make some positive contributions to us—me. His biggest contribution was me; I never would have formed otherwise. I would have been scattered—Kennon on his farm, Dandrin here, Corilann there. I would have maintained some sort of contact among us, the way I always did even before Dugan came, but nothing like this! Nothing at all.

There's the question of what to do with Dugan's child. Kennon, Corilann, and Jarinne are all raising him. We don't need families now that we have me. I think we'll let Dugan's child in with us for a while; if he shows any signs of being like his father, we can always put him to sleep and let him share his father's dream.

I wonder what Dugan is

thinking of. Now all his projects will be carried out; his city will grow and cover the world; we will fight and kill and plunder, and he will be measurelessly happy—though all these things take place only within the boundaries of his fertile brain. We will never understand him. But I am happy that all these things will happen only within Dugan's mind so long as I am together and can maintain the illusion for him.

Our next project is to reclaim Jubilain. I am sad that he cannot be with us yet, for how rare and beautiful I would be if I had a Singer in me! That would surely be the most wonderful of blendings. But that will come. Patiently I will unravel the strands of Jubilain's tangled mind, patiently I will bring the Singer back to us.

For in a few months it will be summer again, and time for the Singing. It will be different this year, for we will have been together in me all winter, and so the Singing will not be as unusual an event as it has been, when we have come to each other covered with a winter's strangeness. But this year I will be with us, and we will be I; and the songs of summer will be trebly beautiful in Dugan's city, while Dugan sleeps through the night and the day, for day and night on night and day.

COPY CAT

By ROBERT PRESSLIE

Setting a thief to catch a thief is an old adage. So is fighting fire with fire. But those who play with fire sometimes get burned.

THE CAT'S ORIGINAL FUNCTION was to kill time, not men. Holly made the cat after the ship was holed and Graves went limp on his couch with a pea-sized channel between his ears.

He took his partner's death calmly, a predictable reaction since he had been selected for his stability. He also reasoned that if the chances of a hit were a million to one, his own prospect of survival was statistically doubled. His only regret was the early occurrence of the accident. There were more than a hundred days between him and Mars, long and lonely days.

As soon as the motors cut and the ship was in free fall, he went to the files, thumbed through the index and extracted the envelope he

was looking for. It contained his insurance policy against insanity.

Trained to be systematic, he went through the instructions progressively. Not until he had disposed of Graves' body did he flip the sheet to find his next dictated move.

Holly had great self-confidence. He had never quite believed the theory that a man in space must have a companion. He was pretty sure he could have made it alone and still kept his reason. Perhaps that accounted for his smile when he opened the locker indicated in the sheets to find a do-it-yourself kit for making a toy, complete with instruction manual.

Although the manual deliberately made no mention of the end product, he guessed almost im-

mediately when he saw the black nylon fur. He made a mental bow of respect to the astuteness of the flight planning committee. The cat was far from being simple to construct and Holly was no moron. With a minimum of excess freight at its disposal the committee had managed to provide a prophylactic which devoured a lot of time in its construction and then offered a facsimile of familiar companionship when it was completed.

In spite of his conviction that it was superfluous in his case, Holly played with the cat for hours on end. There were times when he found it hard to believe it was only a copy cat, a robot.

Its reactions to stimuli were uncanny. Some of the reactions were simple, like its obedience to "come here" and "go away." Others were more subtle. It reacted to warmth and in the absence of orders to keep off, it would snuggle up in his lap and purr realistically.

Regarding cats, the human race is fairly evenly divided into those who like them and those who don't. Holly was one of the few impartial judges. He could take them or leave them, but he was sufficiently critical to recognise that the copy cat was not displaying any particular affection for himself when it curled up on his knees. The cat had no internal source of power and to remain

alive it had to recharge its storage cells at frequent intervals; heat and light were the two agents which energised the cells. The designers had incorporated a survival compulsion which made the cat ingratiatingly friendly.

Whether he was right or wrong about the strength of his own stability, Holly came through the hundred days of solitude alive and sane. Whether he believed it or not, the cat helped enormously.

But it killed him in the end.

There is a practical limit to the degree in which a ship can be made automatic, and after a transit of nearly forty million miles there are adjustments which must be made by human hands before the controls are handed back to the computers for the landing. The adjustments are few, but they must be made.

One of the things which the computers could not predict was the degree of the ship's longitudinal rotation about its line of flight. Holly's craft was heading for Mars at right angles to the surface. He eased her into the correct position with plenty of time to spare. He cross-checked his altitude on visual and radar; it failed to tally with the figure given by duration-and-velocity. The difference was four hundred feet. Unless he corrected the direction of flight he was going to pulverise the ship on the crest of a hill.

But in spite of the prevailing flatness of the planet there were hills all over the region below him and suddenly time was short—too short to find a new landing site.

He set the torque controls on manual. The others he switched to automatic. He watched the count-down from his pad and braced himself for the deceleration.

And he had completely forgotten the cat.

For upwards of thirty minutes the cat had been obliged to forego his company. Its cells were in need of more energising than artificial light alone could supply. It started to crawl towards Holly's pad.

He didn't see it at first. He was watching the terrain through polarised glasses, picking his spot in the three-dimensional picture provided by the twin screens. The side pieces of the glasses obscured his vision in the cat's direction. When it came close enough to catch his eye he could spare no thought for it except amusement.

The cat was flat on its belly, its legs spread-eagled. It progressed by a tortoise-like jerking of its feet and its speed was comparable.

When the cat reached the edge of his pad Holly noticed it again. This time he was annoyed. But the moment was critical and he forgot it again in his concentration.

It was on his chest before he knew. There were only seconds to go for the end of the first deceleration burst. Holly reasoned that it would be easier to get rid of the cat then and kept his eyes grimly on the screens.

He reckoned without the cat's perseverance. It clawed its way up his chest, seeking the warmth of his bare skin. It lay across his face. The motors cut out and he lifted his free hand to swipe the cat away. It dug its claws in. He felt panic. Clutched the cat by the neck and jerked it aside, regardless of the tearing of his own flesh.

He hadn't dare breathe for a full minute. When he did it was with an indrawn gasp of shock. He had run out of time. High as he was, there was just not enough time to move the ship laterally and still make a vertical touchdown.

At any instant now the computers would trigger the landing blast, the final cancellation of all velocity. Holly quelled his panic and fired the torque jets. He had heard it was possible to make an angled descent; Pommard had done it successfully two years earlier, on a yielding sand dune.

The main jets and the torques fired together. The ship slanted safely over the top of the hill. But it hit a shoulder halfway down, two hundred feet above the surface of the planet, two hundred

feet higher than the computers had estimated. Two hundred feet sooner than the cancellation of all velocity. The ship bounced off the shoulder. Its main tubes carried it horizontally for a mile. When they cut out for the last time, Holly still had hopes of a sand-plough belly landing.

He was unlucky. The nose of the ship hit a miserable outcrop of rock. The ship spun round and hit the next outcrop broadside on. It split from end to end like and overripe bean pod. Holly was dead before the wreckage stopped rolling.

The cat was luckier. It had more lives than a man. Eight more.

Tatem, Burge and Ferguson climbed out of the foxhole and slapped the red dust from their sandsuits. The ship had dropped below the horizon, more than three miles away. It was impossible to estimate the extent of the damage without close examination, but they were thankful that at least there had been no explosion. Whole or broken, the ship was one hundred per cent. salvagable; burned and molten it would have been useless.

They were hard men, living the hard way in a hard world. Of necessity, their only grief was a purely selfish one—the loss of two pairs of hands. The grip on Mars was precarious, little more than a fingerhold. Eight ships

had been despatched from Earth, eight ships and sixteen men. Five ships and seven men had arrived. To these seven survivors went the task of digging the first roots in the new world. They did it by cannibalising the ships to make airtight, sandproof cells in which men could live. One day the ring of cells would be completed, domed over and called a Beehive—the first Martian settlement.

Holly's ship was a new factor in a simple sum. One ship equalled five cells. Five new compartments could be built. But the builders still numbered only seven.

Burge eased off one side of his nose-clip and dabbed the raw skin with spit. He spoke round his mouth-tube with practised agility. "I suppose we had better go see," he said. "Pommard and his boys have been slaving since dawn. Grab a few rods."

They waved to Pommard a furlong away where the cells were slowly taking shape. Pommard waved back and they mounted the turbo-sleigh. Every quarter mile they planted markers, flag-topped metal rods; a simple, but necessary, precaution in a land where the dust could wipe out footprints and sleigh tracks in a capricious instant.

Holly's requiem was brief. It came from Tatem: "He died quick."

"And alone," said Ferguson.

"You couldn't make more than one man out of that mess."

The dismantling of the ship would come later. For the moment they contented themselves with seeing that it was in a safe state to be left. They closed cocks, cut wires and made sure the reactor's dampers were in. Then they gathered all the ship's papers and made back for camp.

In the general carnage they overlooked the scratches on Holly's neck. And since the cat was gaoled in a cage of wreckage they could not be blamed for missing it.

It did not stay trapped for long. A machine has no intelligence, and the cat was a machine, yet in human terms of description it knew it was trapped and realized it was doomed unless it escaped. In prosaic terms its sensory receptors found neither light nor heat in the wreckage but sensed it somewhere outside.

The cat began to work its way free. When it finally struggled into the Martian sunlight its storage cells were almost completely spent and it was content to bask in the sunshine, replenishing its strength. Only with the onset of the chill Martian night did it sense the return of doom. It stirred from the sand and followed the prodings of its receptors—across the desert to a spot three miles away where the temperature was a fraction of a degree higher than the surroundings.

The cat's target was the camp in general, and Pommard in particular.

Pommard was the veteran of the party. He was a tough little man, entirely dedicated to the Martian project. He was not the first man on the planet by any means, but he was the oldest survivor. Other men had come and gone. They were the preliminary scouts. Pommard was the first settler.

He liked to see everyone else in their bunks before turning in himself, and he had a nightly ritual of long standing. He would spend fifteen minutes in the open, just outside the cell airlock, doing nothing but looking at the sky. There was no nostalgia in the action. He was a contented man. But he liked to see the Earth and the other planets and say to himself: well, there they are, they're all right I suppose, but this is what I want, this is home for me.

His greatest ambition was to see the day when the women arrived and the later day when he would have a son beside him on the planet. He had a theory that if the child was gradually weaned off oxygen it could be acclimatised to live in the thin atmosphere without a mask and airbottle. And since he hated the idea of his unborn son being able to do something its father couldn't, he spent the last few minutes of his

nightly vigil with the tube and clip in his hand.

Seven minutes was his record. To the others he claimed that the low barometric pressure enabled him to clear his lungs of stale air. He never told them of the times when the drowsiness of incipient anoxia nearly killed him, nearly made him forget to put the mask on again.

He was near the end of his seventh minute when the cat sprang at his throat.

The cat meant no harm. It sensed the warmest place of its target, the place where Pommard's body heat drifted upwards through the open neck of his sandsuit. And when the blood began to pump the place was warmer still.

For a moment, Pommard was shocked awake. But in the few vital seconds it took him to realize what was happening, he stumbled and fell, groped for his mask and missed it. Then he was unconscious. Maybe he could have been saved if the others had come out to see why he was so long, but when a man wants to be alone you respect his whim. In any case, most of them were asleep. The day's work was too exhausting to encourage insomnia.

They found him stiff and cold in the morning. The cat had left him at the first light of dawn, wandering lazily in the direction of the eastern horizon.

Even without the killer's presence it wasn't difficult to deduce what had happened. They knew for sure there was no animal life on Mars, nothing that could have made the claw marks on Pommard. It followed that the killer had been imported in Holly's ship. The logbook told them the rest of the story.

Burge was Pommard's natural successor. He was next in seniority and he had the same crazy drive to get colonization started. He elected to take the work gang out to the crashed ship to begin dismantling operations.

He said to Tatem and Ferguson: "You two had better figure out some way to catch that cat. It isn't likely to bother us in the daytime, and we know better than to leave any doors open at night, but that doesn't mean we're going to let it run around free. It's got a debt to pay."

Assuming that the cat would return to the camp when the sun went down again, Tatem and Ferguson ringed the settlement with crude gin traps. They baited each with a simple heating element wired to the power generator of the site reactor. It was small work, tediously repetitive work, and they were as tired as the others when it was time to bunk down. They slept secure in the knowledge that every approach to the camp had a deadly snare.

They caught the cat, too, but

all they found in the trap was a leg.

The cat fulfilled expectations by returning to the camp. It had started to trek east towards the rising sun, ever in search of warmth. It had gone a considerable distance when the sun was at meridian. Thereafter it followed the sun in its westward journey and returned in the direction of the camp, getting there at nightfall.

Until after midnight its reactions were neutral. There was no sun to attract it, and there were no proddings from its fully-charged cells to make it seek out heat—not until after midnight when its cells were running down. It ceased its meaningless circling and homed on one of the redly glowing traps.

It felt no pain, of course, when the clamp bit into a foreleg. If it could have felt anything at all it would have been frustration at the disappearance of the source of heat. Tatem and Ferguson wanted a dead cat in the morning; they had fixed the elements to switch off when any trap was sprung. The cat tolerated the situation just long enough for its receptors to report that the night was cold again and the nearest source of heat was the camp inside the ring of traps. It tried to move. Finding that it could not move while one leg was in the clamp, it bent its

head and dismantled the leg with its metal teeth.

For the rest of the night it nosed around the occupied cells of the camp. It found no way in and was almost extinct when the sun came up to infuse new life into it.

On successive nights it lost the paw of another leg, its tail and one whole side of its face. As a machine it was too rudimentary to learn by its mistakes.

By this time Ferguson had lost interest in the robot cat and joined the others in dismantling the wrecked ship. Tatem, however, took the failure to kill the cat as a personal affront. He started patrolling the vicinity of the camp, and when he failed to find the cat there he began to go further afield. The nearest he got to destroying the robot was removing its nylon fur with an improvised flame thrower, but the sudden heat burst sent the cat scuttling over the sand on two-and-a-half legs in a frenzy of energy. And Tatem had already ventured so far from the camp that he dared not give chase; all the signs pointed to a sandstorm.

There was a sandstorm. The men were forcibly confined to quarters for a couple of days. They fretted. Time was their scarcest commodity with so few hands and so much work. When the sand was still again, they took a dim

view of Tatem dodging work to chase the cat.

He asked for one more try. He said he had the cat's movements taped. He knew it prowled the camp at night and limped eastward in the morning. He asked for the atom bazooka. Normally used for lobbing fissiles at stubborn rockpiles blocking the direct path between the camp and a ship in the course of demolition, it would, Tatem said, be the one weapon to make sure of blasting the cat off the face of Mars.

On a vote, his plea was overruled and he was forced to give up the chase.

But he didn't forget the cat. While his body did his share of the work, his mind was busy preparing plans for roboticide. He had plenty of them, but none that could be put into operation without absenting himself from work. What he wanted was a method of destroying the cat by proxy.

And he evolved one. Set a thief to catch a thief, he gloated. So simple.

The making of it took him forty nights, a hundred hours stolen from his precious sleeping time. Fury was his fuel. Sometimes as he worked after the others were asleep he imagined he heard the cat scratching outside. Then he would unstrap his watch and lay it, face down, so he couldn't see its face.

The extra work took its toll. He was a sick man, in body and in mind, when he crept out of the cell one night with a heavy bundle in his arms.

He set the robot dog on its thick powerful legs, triggered the activator and stood back to watch the fun.

For eyes, the dog had miniature searchlights.

For a nose, it had a receptor tuned to the photo-emissions of beryllium, the cat's main structural material.

For ears, it had one device that reacted to small scratching sounds and another that hungered for the mercury amalgam in the cat's storage cells.

For a mouth, it had a powerful crushing, grinding, tearing tool that breathed out enticing blasts of warm cat-bait.

Everything that the cat was, the dog was geared to destroy. It had more canine instincts built into it than a real dog.

Tatem watched the twin search lights probing the night. He watched the dog twist and turn aimlessly as it sought the cat. He saw it halt, head alerted. When it moved purposefully forward he knew it had scented its prey.

He stepped round the building to keep the dog in sight. He shivered and wished he had made sure the nightsuit's power pack was fully charged. It would be galling to miss the kill because the

pack fizzled out and he had to go inside.

He forgot about the pack when the dog suddenly accelerated. In the beams from its eyes he saw the naked, maimed cat. He wondered why it did not flee—until he remembered that it was not a real cat and that it would be attracted by the heat emanating from the dog's mouth.

The cat limped willingly forward. It allowed itself to be crushed and torn apart without the slightest protest.

Tatem was elated. He would be able to sleep now. He grinned as he went out to inactivate the dog and make sure the cat was reduced to ruin.

The dog came to meet him, and his grin faded. He looked round wildly, estimating the distance

back to the cells and computing his own speed against the dog's. He began to run, unzipping the suit as he went in a desperate attempt to get rid of the power pack with its mercury amalgam core—

The atom bazooka had to be used after all. Burge blinked in the morning sun, pressed the others back into the cell and asked for the weapon.

Ferguson was nearest. He asked: "What do you want that for?"

Burge took the bazooka and fixed the shoulder straps. "There's a dog out there," he said grimly. He hoisted the six-foot tube and took a missile from Ferguson.

"With a bone," he added.



No Greater Love . . .

By NICHOLAS CANADINE

No greater love has any man that he lay down his life for his friend. But the sacrifice demanded of Charles was far greater. He had to risk not only his life but his sanity.

THE MACHINE CHOSE CHARLES. With a fall like the fall of a mating hawk eight prongs fitted into eight sensile holes and Charles was selected.

The Curn translated the things that had sated the Machine:—

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1. AESTHETIC | 0 |
| 2. ASTHENIC | 0 |
| 3. HYPERSENSITIVE | 0 |
| 4. HYPERTHYROID | 0 |
| 5. IDEALIST | 0 |
| 6. INTELLECTUAL | 0 |
| 7. LEFT OF CENTRE | 0 |
| 8. MUSICAL | 0 |

Charles Ranger, arranged in alphabetical order: Charles Ranger, Director of Earth Personnel; Charles Ranger, 28, tall, thin, bereaved of mother, father, who were killed by enemy action and left alive. Mother: mainly now on all fours, slobbering at times, and three times daily snarling for food. Father: Chess Champion Hastings Congress,

3124; Moscow, 3130; Life Member, Manhattan Chess Club; author, "Some Critical Situations in the King's Electronic Declined (fully annotated)."

The Psis took his brain. He can smile; and I do not like to see my father smile.

"Charles."

"Curn."

"Do you know why you are here at this desk?"

"No. Something to do with my job, I guess."

The Curn passed over the stat sheet, which in principle Charles had helped to develop.

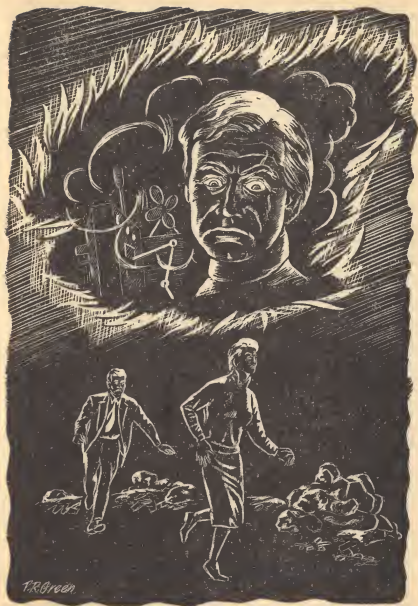
"Music! Then it's not about my job."

"Were you fond of your father, Charles?"

"What do you think?"

"Have you been to his stable since he was attacked?"

"Once. His food had been put a little too far away in the hay.



He couldn't ask me for it. He couldn't reach. I kicked it to him. He didn't know I was his son. I do not wish to see my father again."

The Curn offered him a cigarette.

"And the enemy?"

"How can you kill a Psi? What is there to kill? I would true-die gladly if I could have five minutes alone with a Psi. With my hands on him—or it. Curn, if there was something tangible. If there was something to fight!"

"It's easy to fight and die, Charles. We want a man to do these things and live—not any man—but you. This thing is beyond heroism. It's beyond death. The Machine chose you."

"I'd like to have a go," Charles said simply.

The smoke from his cigarette was lazy as he remembered the days when his father had taught him the openings at Chess, when his mother had smiled and raced him along the beach. And now he was in accord with the Machine, that wanted him to accept a living death.

He had to be. That was what the Machine was for.

"I'll put you in the picture," said the Curn. "We're losing our war. We have no defence. They're here now. But we do not know where. And when they are in a position to disclose themselves there will be no one to oppose them. The destruction of Earth brains is now on the fringe of a

geometrical progression. When that tenuous border is reached, humanity will die."

"Like my father died."

"And my little Jean."

"Oh, Curn."

So the repellant had failed; and Jean had gone—to continue, in a way, to live. Jean was thirteen years old, and she had developed the gracious human form of the thirty-second century; and she had been serene, and pure of heart—niece to Charles. And now the Psis had taken her.

The Psis had no human form. They bred in breeding reactors and they fed in feeding reactors, and bodies they desired. Charles thought of a folk song and of the mood it evoked in him: "*I dream of Jeannie with the light brown hair.*"

He thought of the things that might happen to Jean.

"*I dream of Jeannie.*"

The smoke wafted upwards from his cigarette in laziness now controlled.

"I'll do anything you want."

"It is a horrible thing that we want."

"Can it be as bad as the things that have happened to Jean, and to my mother?"

"It can. It can be worse. Jean and your mother have no consciousness of change. We think that you will have."

The Curn smoked for a while and continued.

"We cannot fight the Psis

because we do not know the course of their action against us. We only know the means and the result. We want to simulate this action and this result. You have all these qualities"—he flipped at the stat sheet—"and you can verbalise.

"No person who has been attacked by the Psis can manage afterwards to speak. That is their way of life, and we must accept it. Perhaps they are able to speak, but their initiative is destroyed, and the result is the same.

"If you agree to this experiment, we hope that you will be able to tell us what happened; for only you will know. If you succeed, we will have data. The sonic weapon of the Psis is a scientific weapon of attack. Therefore, science must know a weapon of defence. We must find out. And first we must have facts. Data. That is what we want from you."

"What are the details?"

The Curn stood up.

"Come on, Charles. We'll have lunch at the Bronx Museum. I know you like a good meal. And besides, if you volunteer for what we want—well, I guess you'll eat a lot more, but I don't think you'll appreciate it."

Charles tried to smile.

"Fruit juice," he said. "Escalope Marsala, celery, Gorgonzola cheese, coffee. The perfect meal."

He looked out of the window and down at the dome of St. Paul's.

"But why go all the way to the Bronx? What's the matter with the British Restaurant?"

"Come on," said the Curn. "I'll tell you as we go."

The war had waged for many years. It began soon after the first galactic flight to Hast some twenty years of chronological time ago. From this flight there had been no return for an overdue time. Then one day three men stepped out of the ship. At that moment they were men. At the next they were beasts.

The doctors and examiners talked of shock—some great traumatic experience of galactic space that had destroyed their reason.

This sounded valid until someone asked how, in that event, they had managed to dock the ship with human skill before collapse at the moment of landing.

There was no further data. The three survivors were given awards—and keepers.

Then data began to arrive. It began in Russia, in Manitoba, in Texas, in Egypt. The places of the plains.

For a decade the data grew.

The iodine content of the water was examined. The whole range of scientific tests was applied. And these were the facts:—

1. The incidents occurred in flat land.

2. In each of those areas beam reception had become bad in a

fashion akin to that of a sunspot-filter breakdown.

3. The population was sparse and the people seemed to have their human brains destroyed.

ACTION: Evacuation to mountainous terrain.

Then came the tie-up with the journey to Hast, for the men of the plains, the women, the children who had laughed, were stricken in identical fashion to the men from space.

After ten years, in which evacuation had ended the trouble, the beam interference had spread to the districts of low hills. And the plague had synchronised.

A crew volunteered as guinea-pigs for Hast. In addition to the traditional clothes for galactic space, experimental additional clothing was provided, as well as irradiated food and drink.

On the return, one man could talk; and the next fact emerged, for he had been the only member of the crew with soundproofed clothing.

"We're going to the Bronx for a special reason," said the Curn. "The Curator of the Bronx Museum has had an idea that ties up with your selection."

They landed.

"And here he is to meet us. He's a charming man. Dr. Weber—Charles."

"I've been hearing a little about you, Dr. Weber."

"And I have heard, of course, of you, and of your distinguished father. I forget who it was who said that mathematics were the bare bones of music, but I have been struck by the relationship between your father's 'King's Electronic Declined' and your own 'Tonal Elements of the Diminished Seventh.' I do hope that we have time for a game. I'm sure that you play. I rather fancy myself, you know."

Charles smiled. "It is strange, Dr. Weber, how we all pride ourselves on our hobbies and tend to deride the thing that is our main task in life. Music and chess mean so much to me . . . and yet, they are useless things."

"Of course. Was it not the seventeenth-century Japanese who held that non-utilitarianism is the prime delineation of art?"

And so their civilised meal progressed—a meal of cultivated people drawn from separate walks of life by a common purpose towards a common end.

"Coffee, gentlemen?"

"Thanks, Curn. Irradiated. Black."

"I'll take mine white," said Weber.

So came the coffee, and cigars from lovely Havana.

"Weber," said the Curn, "I want you to talk about your discovery. I know you're a born lecturer, so you can lecture us if you like. Do use these matches

for your cigar. I have only a hundred left. I really think that they're the last matches on this planet. They were found during the excavation of Scotland after the fourth revolution. Such whimsical things, I think."

And then the laughter stopped.

Centuries ago the Terran wars had ended, and warlike things had gone from the Earth. Those centuries had seen the development of a hegemony that had broken down the cultures of religion and race. Intermarriage had developed from a policy decision of the past to something approaching an instinct. The creed of selective breeding had broken down at the end of the super-race wars. Now there was one race only, and intolerance had gone from Earth. And as the Earth had developed its new-found peak of civilization, so had come the new enemy, for there must always be the destruction tests that have made humans the animals supreme. There must always be wars.

Even the dreadful thing of the Psis.

"First," said Weber, "I noted the fact of the spaceman's uniform. It was proofed to all degrees of sound. This suggested that the rest of the crew had been—destroyed—by a sonic weapon.

"Then there was the suggestion of interference from the hills and mountain ranges of the Earth, that at first had limited the

attack to the people of the Steppes, Manitoba, and the like—people of the flatlands.

"Then it became evident that this difficulty was being overcome by the Psis, and finally they mastered it.

"I could find no help in the present, so I turned to the past."

"To the Russians?" asked the Curn.

"No. Oddly enough, no. The background is this. We were excavating in Surrey, England. We came across some twentieth century human remains in a small cemetery of heavy clay deposit. Several of these skulls had curious incisions or breaks. Some were on one side and some were on both. These breakages were man-made, and the general care of the dead suggested that the incisions had been made from beneficent motives."

"What were they?" asked Charles.

"By great good fortune we had stumbled on a burial place of people who had been subjected to the neurosurgical operation known as pre-frontal leucotomy."

"I'm afraid you're getting beyond me," said Charles.

"This was a device of the dark ages to bring relief to people whose brains had reached, through various stresses, a state of unendurable strain. By a simple incision the nerves of the higher part of the brain—the pre-frontal

lobes—were severed in whole or in part. Depending on the severity of the incision the patient became placid, contented, no longer capable of such things as the function of leadership—cowlike, I suggest.

"You could say that it was spiritual suicide, or mental castration. The victims—or patients—became ideal dictator-subjects. But, indeed, it was most interesting to note that when the Russians were developing their dictator system, they appealed to the World Health Organization to ban this operation on the ground that it violated the principles of humanity.

"Scientific writers of the twentieth century—Jacquetta Hawkes was one of the most eminent—suggested that it were better for a man to take his life than to submit to such a thing. And as neurosurgery developed the prefrontal leucotomy was banned."

Charles stubbed out his cigar.

"You want me to submit to this operation?"

"Yes."

"And the music? Where does that come in?"

"It will provide—it will induce the unendurable strain that will put your mind into the optimum situation for such an event."

"But I love music."

"Not the way we shall play it . . . but, Charles, it would be better if we didn't go into details. Can you accept the situation?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll leave you now. We shall see you again. But we shall pick our moment. It will depend on a number of factors."

"And I will provide them?"

"And you will provide them . . . Goodbye, Charles."

No greater love . . .

As Charles entered the beautiful woodland place that was to be his home he was not afraid. All the resources of his character and personality were enrolled.

The nurse who met him was a Balino-Swiss. Her uniform was of Nu-Breath plastic. In the care of the sick—and that is what Charles was to become—the first need was to break down inhibition. The Machine had chosen Trudy for such a task, and that is what she did.

"We like to go by forenames."

"My name is Charles."

"And mine is Trudy. I hope you'll soon be better."

"But I'm not sick. I've come here on special duties."

"Sure. Sure," said Trudy.

"Your doctor is Dr. Lois. She'll be along in a minute. Be seeing you."

He walked around the room like a dog encircling a rug. He noticed that the room had the sparse and neutral furnishings of a vikarion—beige plastic drapes to give out warmth and scent, and love, and hate, and the horror of the night.

"Yes, Charles. The horror of the night."

"Why . . . ?"

She was short—not more than six foot three. She was petite and dainty. Her voice was low.

"Why," Charles exclaimed, "you're . . ."

"I'm your psych, Charles. I'm Lois. We're going to see each other a lot. Cigarette?"

"Yes, I'll have a cigarette; but your face. I know you. You won the . . ."

"All right, Charles. I won the '57 Serenity Cup. It's one of the reasons why the Machine chose me to look after you."

"I don't understand."

"Let's talk about music. Tell me about your taste in music."

"It's wide."

"And your favourites?"

"Classics."

"Tell me some of their names."

"Jazz Me Blues; Suite No. 3, in D; some Reginald Forsythe; some Folk Songs."

"Such as——"

The vike took it up. He knew at once that it had to come.

"Not that! Not that!"

The drapes changed their colour. Soft blues. Greys. The gentle perfumes of a girl near woman. The poignancy of the voice of the greatest *castrato* of them all—Jacques Blum:

"I dream of Jeannie with the light brown hair!"

"Stop it, doctor. Stop it!"

The drapes were beige again. The music was gone.

"Call me Lois. Not doctor."

"That tune!"

"Tell me about Jean. Did you love her?"

"The Curn is my friend. And Jean was his daughter. I loved her like she was my own daughter. She called me 'uncle.' And now she's been bestialised, and you play that thing to remind me of her."

Lois took his hands in her own.

"Charles. It is tearing my heart to do what I have to do. You are vulnerable. Your sensitivity lies in your music and in your gentle heart, and these two things we must destroy before we can leucotomise your brain. There are other 'Jeannies,' Charles, a world full of them. All to be bestialised unless we can win. I would give my own life gladly if it were any good. And when this is all over I'll give it to you . . . if you want it."

Charles looked at her. He felt that the interview was ending, and he did not want it to end. He had himself terminated many professional interviews; it was a procedure of kindness and skill, and as Lois conducted it these two things shone out in high degree.

"Trudy will bring you a quarter grain of complemene in half an hour. That is the last of the benign vikarions we shall give you until after your leucotomy. This will be your last restful night. Tomorrow we shall give you hyper-æsthetics. And music."

There was down on her forearm—and freckles. She represented the peak of the great terran culture.

They looked at each other. The telepathy that passed between them was no modern thing. It began with Adam.

Charles had offered himself to the Machine altruistically; but altruism is a cold thing in the dawn light. At any moment from now the Psis could strike Lois, and the Charles/Lois look blended urgently and with greater intensity on that account.

Charles knew now that the dawn light belonged to Lois—to Lois and himself together—with all the other lights.

In the lifeboat urgency of the terran crisis Charles wasted no time.

"Will the leucotomy take me away from you?"

"The Machine chose me to be your doctor," she said. "I love the Machine for choosing me. But from the moment the complemene arrives it is my task to induce compulsion-obsession in your mind. Then we shall leucotomise you. Then we shall try to take from you the data of the Psis and put it to terran account."

"And the method you will use?"

Slowly she leaned over him as he sat in his chair. Her lips played gently on his brow.

"The method is love. The Machine has chosen us. And love

will bring you back to me. My love. The love of the world. Goodnight, my love."

The world had no time to lose; and on the next day the music began.

At first it was gentle. Then the tape was off-centre. Then Trudy arrived with the hyperæsthetic. She found a pain zone in his arm. The human pain zones had been plotted for hundreds of years, and Charles guessed that her act was deliberate.

The hyperæsthetics had first come to prominence in the twentieth century at the hands of the politician Hitler. In the days of politicians, cruelty had been a medium of government; and a technique of cruelty had sprung up, and biochemistry had been enlisted in its aid.

For hundreds of years there had been no government and no cruelty. Poor Trudy spoke not at all. She had caused pain. She was probably the first person of her generation to do so, and she turned away as though in disgrace. The Machine required that there should be no amelioration of Charles' distress, and Trudy must make no sign of regret.

The vikarion changed. The red/blue colour disturbed his mind. He heard some music from the primitive Bach, and identified it as "Toccata and Fugue for Unaccompanied Violin."

The music was swift and computer-like, and was born of mathematics. The colours draped at a beat in variance to the music. I can stand it, Charles thought. Simple dis-synchronisation.

The volume increased. The music changed to modern stuff and back to "Jazz Me Blues." Then Charles began to tremble, for "Jazz Me Blues" was a period piece to *Jeannie With the Light Brown Hair*. Jeannie, the girl with whom the Psis made sport. His titular niece. Soon they would play that tune, and soon he would scream.

Now the injection took effect.

A wave of intensity swept to his brain, and another followed, and they mounted up, wave after wave, until his reaction to the sound was a crucifixion of pain.

Now there was more volume. The thuds of sound reverberated and smashed back at his hyper-aesthetised brain.

Jeannie.

With the light brown hair.

He screamed.

The music stopped.

He turned his face to the wall. The light dimmed. He wanted to stay there, facing the wall; to stay there for ever.

The wall moved away.

And Jeannie returned. She returned as she had been before the Psian attack and as she now appeared. Both Jeans were there. Where the wall had been. Both

of them—little Jean, the daughter of his friend, the Curn; and the slobbering thing with hypertrophied drugs that the Psis had left.

There comes a time when a man can scream no more, and in this second attack Charles reached it soon, for he was a sensitive man, and the greater the sensitivity the greater the delicacy of balance of a brain. His brain. Charles' brain.

Then he whimpered. Like a child. And kept on.

Weber came into the room. And the Curn. And Lois.

"Turn it off," said Charles. "Please turn it off."

There was no pity on Weber's face or the Curn's; and although it broke her heart, there was none from Lois. It was a merciless imitation of insanity that had been imposed and it held no room for love. Not even the love of Lois, which poured from her heart and away.

Weber turned to the Curn.

"It's a thousand years since any surgery was done by incision," he said. "We have reconstructed from the microfilm we found in Surrey. The front of the patient's hair is shaved. There is an incision of an inch or so in the right temple—for this is a modified leucotomy that we plan. Underneath the incision the skull is cracked. Then some of the nerves in the white part of the brain are

severed . . . But you must put my words in your own professional language. You have studied the microfilm for the technical jargon. We, too, have our jargon in my own profession."

"Which is?"

"Archæology. You deal in the dead."

"Yes," said Weber. He glanced at Lois and from her to Charles.

"And you?"

"I deal in the living dead."

She said it harshly; and as she bit her lip the blood entered her mouth. Her own, her living blood.

The conversation stopped as Trudy entered. She carried a sheet of irradiated niffon and an electronic razor of the twenty-first century that had been treasured in the Bronx Museum for hundreds of years. It was based on the principle of the first electric razors, and the beam sensed out each hair and eradicated it individually and at high speed.

But Trudy now was not the gracious Balinese that Charles had seen in earlier days. She was the Nordic blonde, stupid, stern, efficient—almost Germanic in her ruthless efficiency.

"You will sit up, Charles."

When people whimper they are no match for the super-Hun, and Charles obeyed.

Clinically, she set about the business of shaving his hair; and soon she had finished, and Charles looked grotesque. He

didn't need to be shown for any purpose of his own, but it was in the briefing, and Trudy picked up a mirror, and pushed him forward so that he saw.

"Jeannie," said Trudy. "What would she think if she could see you now?"

"Not now," whimpered Charles.

But Weber nodded. The vikarion sprang into action. And there was Jean—the *first* Jean—in the room, under the beige drapes. She looked up from her work, and she saw what she saw, and horror filled her face. Charles moaned and turned in anguish to Weber.

"Pentathol by injection," said Weber.

"Isn't that what they called the truth drug?"

Weber smiled. "Maybe so. I remember once from my school-days that someone posed the question—what is truth? And I do not think that anyone has answered yet. But Charles might know."

Quickly he stopped the train of thought that was leading him on to kindly things. There must be no kindness for Charles. Not yet.

Trudy injected the pentathol into Charles' arm. The change was instantaneous.

"How are you feeling now?" asked the Curn, entering the discussion for the first time.

"Go jump in the bloody psionicus," said Charles.

"Charles!" said Trudy.

"You see," said Weber. "The childishness, the disinhibition. And now we will inject the pethidine."

Charles did not resist and did not care as the second needle entered his arm. And as they led him away he told them where else they might put it.

He was an elated man. He swore a little in the fashion of a man tipsily but not seriously drunk. He wanted to say "Good old Curn," but the words would not come. He wanted to slap the Curn's shoulder, but his hand wouldn't move.

Things were peaceful for him now. There was movement taking place. They were undressing him. They placed him on a trolley, and the party of them left the vikarion for the surgery.

The light streamed down on him. There were people in green, and Weber, and Lois. He decided to shut his eyes and ignore them all.

They lifted him from the trolley.

"Come on, Charles," said Weber, and now there was kindness in his voice, for the first of Charles' sacrifices had been made.

Although Charles had decided to ignore the whole proceeding, there was one thing he could not ignore. Lois leaned over him. Some parts of his senses were now unconscious. Others were not. As she leaned over, her arm

brushed against the back of his folded hand. He felt a great soothing come over his mind and above the sedation of the drugs. The feel of the warmth of her arm was the most intensely *feminine* thing that he had ever known. He knew that from this moment his life was bound to her own.

Because of the action of the drugs he was insensitive now to pain. But in a strange and limited way, he was aware of some other things.

The operating theatre had been reconstructed on the basis of discoveries that had been made of the incisive surgery period, and over his head there were powerful lights. Although a part of his brain was dead, the lights were so strong that he was aware of them through his unopened lids.

Life was pleasant as the surgeons did their work. He heard their voices. Not Lois's voice, but the voices of men. They were discussing technical things—discussing them with the objectivity of scientific people. He liked dispassionate words, and at the moment he had no care.

Then there was silence.

Then came the *scaunch*, the painless *scaunch* of his skull as they opened his head. The light over his eyes. The new absence of sound. The abandonment of his mind to relief. He knew it was done. His sacrifice had been made.

The Machine.

For the Machine he felt a great warmth. The Machine had guided his destiny since it had mated his parents—his mother, and his P-K4 dad. Over hundreds of years the Machine had been built, and because of its building and because of its life, all sorrow had gone from the earth.

But it had returned in the hands of the Psis. The Galaxy had rebelled at the paradise on Earth where evil had known no place.

He tried to say "I, therefore, died," but the words were too hard. Faces leaned over his bed. Lois's face. Weber's, and the noble face of the Curn.

"Take it easy," said Lois. "Take it easy, my love."

She loved him. She loved him when he was well, and she loved him when he was a shaven-headed horror being sick in a bowl.

They gave him morphia by mouth, and he drifted away from them in a haze of peace.

After a few days' rest he was about again.

They made him work. In these few early days his future was being conditioned. The higher centres of his brain had gone. He was content to sit and dawdle his days away, and so would remain. They cajoled him and sometimes bullied him to work, to work at tasks of any sort, so that a new cellular pattern could

be formed and so that habit could take the place of initiative.

They knew that he was in love with Lois and she with him. It had been arranged. They moved her office to a distant part of the establishment and forbade her to travel to him.

He moved to her. Each day a gentle Charles moved slowly across the gracious lawns to her quarters. He sat in her chair and watched her. He watched the quick, vital movements that added animation to her personality. Since his operation he had none of his own.

Sometimes he wanted to say things. He had good ideas. Brilliant phrases formed in his mind. It was a good idea to say them, but he couldn't be *bothered*. He wanted to tell her that he loved her, to preen himself as a male, to attract.

"You're all right," he said.

"And you," said Lois. "I love you."

He ought to squeeze her hand; but he didn't. He couldn't.

She kissed him. The first reported kiss of a leucotomised man. Yes, he thought. I remember kissing. There was mother; and when I was at the University there were quite a number. But he couldn't be bothered to go into details. There was nothing about which he could bother any more. It was a good idea; so let it remain.

"We think we've got the idea with the Psis," said Lois.

"Of course," said Charles. "The Psis." His tone suggested that he might equally have been talking about yesterday's news.

Lois did not mind the flatness of his voice. The Machine had impetised her love. Her love was secure and warm, and eternal, and it belonged to Charles, who had made the supreme sacrifice and lived.

"I don't sound very enthusiastic," he said. "But I am. Inside."

"I know, my love. We must talk a lot together. We've got to find out exactly what a leucotomy does to a brain. This we can only do by comparing your present behaviour with what you would have done before. Then we are going to feed the various qualities into the Machine. Then we are going to produce two hundred thousand cerebroclasts. The Psis can destroy a natural emotion, but they are powerless against mechanical love. All things are powerless against the Machine," she added reverently. "And we are going to use these cerebroclasts to inoculate every person on Earth. No living person who has not yet been attacked will be missed."

"And me?"

"Not quite the first to be treated. You are the sole experimental brain. We hope that you

will elect to stay as you are until we have used the cerebroclasts and seen the result . . . It is what the Machine would wish."

"I'm not awfully good at wanting, nowadays," said Charles. "The drive has gone. But I want you. Do you think you understand what I mean?"

"Put your arm around me," she said.

"Where are we going?"

She smiled and squeezed his hand.

Soon the prototype cerebroclast was made. The Curn called a meeting. He called it by visiting Lois and Charles.

On Earth there were now no leaders. The last of the leaders of Earth had been ceremoniously killed a thousand years ago, in the barbarous ages. There were books about it, and legends; but his name was not used.

When he died the warm grass sighed with relief, and the young trees murmured, for they were of the dead that the leaders had slain. The leadership/hate equation had been solved, and the grass found peace, and was warm as it opened to life; and babies laughed, and mothers watched their sons without fear.

And now there was only the Curn. The world accepted the Curn, and not from propaganda, but by rumour in the people's gentle homes. He was what they

would wish their sons to become. Lois had said to Charles: I like you to hold my hand. Will you hold my hand?

It was strange that these things had to be said, thought Charles. The holding of hands was a simple pantomime, to do with love, a preparatory step. It was a thing that he wanted to do, as any lover did; but without her request he could not *bother*. The emotional drive had gone from his brain.

In her wisdom and in her love, Lois had replaced this drive with a wish of her own. He had a command to obey, and his esoteric intellect had not been harmed. He could do what she wished. (He could play chess with her. His thinking brain had been cleared. But if he won he didn't want to jump for joy. He had won. And that was all.)

So, hand in hand, they walked across the grass to meet the Curn, who was coming himself to meet them, over the hill, as though he had used his telepathy to find them.

The Curn had no personality. He had no affectation and he had no non-affectation. His clothing was loose and easy, not especially good nor especially bad. He had no personality to express in clothes, and needed none.

"How are you, Charles?" he asked.

"I'm better, now, thank you."

Yes. I'm better, now.

"Would you like a little stroll?" asked the Curn. "They're going to feed the cerebroclast to the Machine, today. It's only twenty miles. Do you think you can manage it?"

Charles looked at Lois. He did not want to go and he did not *unwant*. The day was warm. There was peace with Lois, but she was his constant need. He had no want at all.

"What does Lois think?"

Together they strolled at a gentle six miles an hour.

"We ought really to talk about the leucotomy," said the Curn. "Don't you think the word '*ought*' sounds strange?"

"It's nearly a thousand years since we terrans had an '*ought*.' I hardly know how to pronounce it."

"And that's another thing the Psis have brought."

"And through Charles' help our children may not know how to pronounce the *Psis*."

"Our children," said Lois. She glanced at Charles. Her lips parted one from the other.

Over the hill there showed the tall mast of the Machine. It's sensing fingers wavered in the breeze, and sometimes resisted against the breeze.

"The leucotomy is almost impossible to describe," said Charles. "You know that I am a scientific worker, and that I have been professionally trained. But I can-

not bring my professional mind to bear on the leucotomy in the form of words."

"Just use whatever words you can," said the Curn. "It's high time professional jargon faded out, anyhow."

"The over-riding thing is the dissociation of my mind from my body . . .

"This thing that is strolling towards the Machine is clearly not me. I'm in it. But it isn't me.

"I want you to imagine . . ." He turned to the Curn. "I want you to imagine that you are looking into a mirror. I do not mean in the fashion of a man shaving or of a man admiring himself. I mean, the thoughtful, self-assessing look that all men use from time to time."

There seemed to be some emotion in Charles' voice.

"I understand what you mean," said the Curn.

"Well, that sort of look is the sort that I have used from time to time, like any other man. But since the leucotomy it has a particular sort of horror. The man that I see isn't *me*. I've gone from my body."

"You feel that you lack completeness?"

"I wish that was all it was," said Charles. "But it's worse. It seems now that there are two halves of me; and they are not joined together. I have no self.

There are two halves. And they are not me."

Lois looked at the Curn. This revelation had torn her lover apart. No normal event was worth such a thing, she thought; and, as she caught the break in his voice, no abnormal thing, either. Almost not the Psis.

"But you're whole to me," she said. "I never knew you before. It is the *present* you that I love"

"It is the old one that I have to forget."

"I should think that the adjustment will come in time," said the Curn.

"And whether or not," said Lois, "we will have our sons."

"The other things," said the Curn. "Perhaps they won't be so bad to relate."

"Management," said Charles. "I've been Director of World Personnel since the Machine chose me at twenty-one. I could no more exercise the function of management now than I could walk to the Moon."

"Is there any auto-suggestion about such a thing? Is that what you really feel?"

"Yes. I've ruled out suggestion. It is a true state of affairs."

"And do you think that it is wholly a bad thing?"

"No. There're plenty of managers. The bit that I had that found content in management

has gone. It doesn't matter any more. In this respect you could say that my brain has cleared. I must think around a purely intellectual pursuit and take up a new occupation. In this respect I might have gained . . .

"If Lois is with me I have *drive*. If she isn't, it doesn't matter."

"But I will be, Charles. I will always be. It is the new you that I love. I never knew the old."

"Would you say that your intelligence has reduced?" asked the Curn.

Charles pondered. He knew the answer, but it was hard to say. To those last words he had brought a different content. It was hard to say. He didn't *want*.

Finally he spoke. The question required an answer. A question was, in a sense, an instruction. In the question the reflex was imposed.

"No," said Charles. "I don't think so. Except in learning a new thing. If there is anything that I do as work in the future, it will have to be based on something I already know. I cannot learn. The drive isn't there. If you were to try to teach me a new thing—a direction to a place, for example—my mind would rebel and reject your words."

"And Chess? Have you experimented?"

"Yes," said Charles. "Of course, the King's Electronic Declined

is my favourite opening. It would have to be, since my father developed it. My game has improved. I've checked with Lois. It is an opening that neutralises P-Q4. I tried to learn the Centre Counter Gambit. I couldn't play it at all."

"But you drew the game, after a while."

"Yes. I exchanged pawns and exchanged Queens and converted the game. As soon as the conversion took place I was back to my old form; such a game has to end in a draw with the best of play."

"I see. Is it possible to summarise your conclusions?"

"I think so. In a way, the thing that happened to me is a worsening of death. I have been to the unknown. I took with me my knowledge of the known. And I have returned. It is an unnatural thing. That is what I meant when I talked about the mirror. My mind has been de-natured. The old me ought to die. My intellect says that I should commit the suicide of the old me. If it were not for Lois there would be no new me, and I should probably do so. If I could be bothered."

"And is that all?"

"Pretty well. But I'm getting hungry. I'm talking too much. I don't like to talk. I can't be *bothered*. The last thing is, I've read in the legends the stories of the robot men, and of dictators. I feel like a robot. I respond like

one. I think like one. I am the robot man. And I live. And I love."

They walked in silence, but the mood of their day had gone. The flat tones of Charles had told of a tragedy that was alien to their way of life. It had not happened before within their culture. It was a tragedy that Lois could not understand, in spite of the fact that she was a doctor and that she was in love with him. The whole of her normal work had needed a datum line and she had never known Charles before his leucotomy, for the Machine had chosen her for instant love, and she, therefore, had no datum line in relation to Charles. She knew only that she loved, and that the things that her scientific brain demanded could wait on love.

The mood had gone.

There was an intense cloud in the sky. A *small* cloud. It obscured the sun on their faces. And as they walked it continued in direct line between themselves and the sun.

There was no wind.

It was the Curn who noticed the oddity of the cloud. At the speed of their walk its shadow should not have stayed with them for more than a stride or two.

It seemed to shrink.

It had focused its partial cover on Lois.

"*But clouds don't focus,*" said the Curn, as though to himself.

"Charles—the cloud!"

"I don't understand," said Charles.

"Get hold of her hand and run," said the Curn.

"What for? I'm tired."

"I'm—telling—you—to."

But you can't get hold of a woman's hand when she's crawling on all fours.

You can't get hold of her hand when she—bites.

You can't say words of urgent love to a woman who snarls.

You can't get a response from a woman who drools on the grass like a beast.

"It isn't a cloud," said Charles, "it's from the Psis!"

Charles' intellect was crystal clear, for he had no emotional drive to warp its use. Action must be immediate. It must be now. A mile or so away there was the cerebroclast and safety for Lois. He kicked her rump. There was a response from her quiescent and outraged humanity. She arose.

"You must run," said Charles. "We shall soon be safe."

It would take them a little time to run a mile. Three minutes or so between his love and bestiality.

She turned to him and looked. It was the look of a woman who is going away from her world. He tried to put strength into her

mind from his own cold brain, and it seemed for a minute or so that he had succeeded.

The cloud darkened and intensified. It wavered from Lois and impinged on the Curn.

"You must go," he said, "to the cerebroclast."

He held up his arms as though in invocation to the cloud.

It focused closer to his head.

He halted his stride and Lois and Charles ran on.

The cloud stayed behind.

No greater love . . .

Lois gained in strength and uprightness. It seemed that a duration of time in relationship was necessary to the sense-warper of the Psis, and that she might have escaped from permanent harm.

The minutes had gone, and as they neared the Machine, Lois and Charles almost felt it necessary to ward off with their urgent need the sense of peace that it brought.

The Machine was a glory of the Earth. Its in-built spiritual values had bred. The machines of earlier cultures had been built by men of the technological eras, whose technical skills had been developed to outstrip the mental and emotional requirements of the Earth.

When the last Leader died, science had been freed, and had turned its energy from the development of destructive devices to the

incarnation of the multiple soul. They called their work the Machine. Explorers no longer sought for Heaven. They knew where it was. And little children knew.

There were now no units of terran personnel. There were people again, and this had been so for hundreds of years. People with names like Lois and Charles.

To whom the Machine beckoned.

The gentle finger hovered over them. They entered the gates. The ultra-co-ordinates had located the cerebroclast at point of entry. And Lois was safe with Charles.

As the gate closed on its hermo-seal a great howl rose on the air from the gentle hill.

It came from the Curn. A howl like the howl of a dog. Charles stopped as though to turn. But Lois took his hand. He sighed. Her tug towards the cerebroclast seemed like an instruction; and he had to obey.

The howl changed to a whine and a whimper; for that is how the world of the Curn had ceased.

The modifications to the prototype cerebroclast took a week from the Curn's last analysis of Charles' brain, from the day of the Psian sense-warper's attack.

Then it was a matter for production.

Designs, drawings, parts lists, specifications. Soon the cerebroclasts rolled off the production lines.

The queues were orderly as the people submitted their skulls to the imposition of the added emotion that would thwart the attack of the Psis. The children were happy as they broke their ranks to play. If they did not understand, they did not wish to do so. They wanted only to know the will of the Machine, and to carry it out; and this is what they did.

Soon it was time for Charles to return to his home.

"It's no use putting it off," said Lois. "You'll have to go."

"You know what'll happen when I get there?"

"You've got to do it, Charles. It's the last of the reactions. After all, the Psis didn't get you. We think we can do the nerve graft. True, the ancients never did it; but they hadn't our resource."

"Suppose I undergo the grafting. Then I would be like I was before the operation. How do I know that you would love me as I was then? I was a helluva fellow then, you know."

"You're a helluva fellow now," said Lois.

"It's the music," he said. "And Jeannie. Abreactive treatment. I don't think I could stand it."

"It's dangerous to say 'I can't stand it.' Dangerous for anyone. And the music isn't abreactive. When you were in the vikarion it wasn't the music at all that was the trouble. It wasn't the association with Jeannie. You were powerless to turn it off. That was the trouble.

"All you've got to do is hear the stuff and tune it in or turn it off, just as you please."

"Can I restore Jeannie?"

"Can you restore the others in the world? Do you know that ten million people were bestialised? We have beaten off the only threat to our world that could exist. And without you we couldn't have done it. We want you straight again."

"I'll go," he said. "But I want you to come with me. I don't want ever to be without you."

"You won't. And when that is over you can help me in my next studies."

"I don't want you to study," said Charles. "You can't study and love at the same time."

"You can at this subject," said Lois.

"What is it?"

"Gravidity."

"But, darling!"

"But nothing, my love."

Together they went hand in hand to the future, and to the past.

THE CAGE

By BERTRAM CHANDLER

It was essential that they convince their captors that they were rational beings. Simple? Perhaps, but first define rational.

ANYONE COULD HAVE BEEN EX-cused for failing to recognise the survivors from the interstellar liner *Lode Star* as rational beings. At least two hundred days had passed since their landing on the planet without a name—an unintentional landing made when *Lode Star's* Ehrenhaft generators, driven far in excess of their normal capacity by a breakdown of the electronic regulator, had flung her far from the normal shipping lanes to an unexplored region of space. *Lode Star* had landed safely enough—but shortly thereafter her Pile had got out of control and her captain had ordered his first mate to evacuate the passengers and such crew members not needed to cope with the emergency, and to get them as far from the ship as possible.

Hawkins and his charges were well clear when there was a flare of released energy, a not very violent explosion. The survivors

wanted to turn to watch, but Hawkins drove them on with curses and, at times, blows. Luckily, they were up-wind from the ship and so escaped the fall-out.

Thereafter the fifty-odd survivors had degenerated. It hadn't been a fast process—Hawkins and Boyle, aided by a committee of the more responsible passengers, had fought a stout rearguard action. But it had been a hopeless sort of fight. The climate was against them, for a start. Hot it was, always in the neighbourhood of eighty-five degrees Fahrenheit. And it was wet—a thin, warm drizzle falling all the time. The air seemed to abound with the spores of fungi—luckily these did not attack living skin but thrived on dead organic matter, on clothing. They thrived to an only slightly lesser degree on metals and on the synthetic fabrics that many of the castaways wore.

Danger, outside danger, would

have helped to maintain morale, but there were no dangerous animals. There were only little smooth-skinned things, not unlike frogs, that hopped through the sodden undergrowth and, in the numerous rivers, fishlike creatures ranging in size from the shark to the tadpole, and all of them possessing the bellicosity of the latter.

Food had been no problem after the first few hungry hours. Volunteers had tried a large, succulent fungus growing on the boles of the huge, fern-like trees. They had pronounced it good. After a lapse of five hours they had neither died nor, even, complained of abdominal pains. That fungus became the staple diet of the castaways. In the weeks that followed other fungi had been found, and berries, and roots—all of them edible. They provided a welcome variety.

Fire—in spite of the all pervading heat—was the blessing most missed by the castaways. With it they could have supplemented their diet by catching and cooking the little frog things of the rain forest, the fishes of the streams. Too—fire would have helped to drive back the darkness of the long nights, would, by its real warmth and light, have dispelled the illusion of cold produced by the ceaseless dripping of water from every leaf and frond.

When they fled from the ship most of the survivors had

possessed pocket lighters—but the lighters had been lost when the pockets, together with the clothing surrounding them, had disintegrated. In any case, all attempts to start a fire in the days when there were still pocket lighters had failed—there was not, Hawkins swore, a single dry spot on the whole accursed planet. Now the making of fire was quite impossible—even if there had been present an expert on the rubbing together of two dry sticks to produce heat by friction he could have found no material with which to work.

They made their permanent settlement on the crest of a low hill. It was less thickly wooded there than the surrounding plains, and the ground was less marshy underfoot. They succeeded in wrenching fronds from the fern-like trees and built for themselves crude shelters—more for the sake of privacy than for any comfort that they afforded. They clung, with a certain desperation, to the governmental forms of the worlds that they had left, and elected themselves a council. Boyle, the ship's surgeon, was their chief. Hawkins, rather to his surprise, was returned as a council member by a majority of only two votes—on thinking it over he realised that many of the passengers must still bear a grudge against the ship's executive staff for their present predicament.

The first council meeting was held in a hut especially constructed for the purpose. The council members squatted in a rough circle. Boyle, the president, got slowly to his feet. Hawkins grinned wryly as he compared the surgeon's nudity with the pomposity that he seemed to have assumed with his elected rank, as he compared the man's dignity with the unkempt appearance presented by his uncut, uncombed grey hair, his uncombed and straggling grey beard.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Boyle.

Hawkins looked around him at the naked, pallid bodies, at the stringy, lustreless hair, the long, dirty finger nails of the men and the unpainted lips of the women. He thought, I don't suppose I look much like an officer and a gentleman myself.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Boyle. "We have been, as you know, elected to represent the human community upon this planet. I suggest that at this, our first meeting, we discuss our chances of survival—not as individuals, but as a race."

"I'd like to ask Mr. Hawkins what our chances are of being picked up," shouted one of the two women members, a dried-up, spinsterish creature with prominent ribs and vertebrae.

"Slim," said Hawkins. "As you know, no communication is

possible with other ships, or with planet stations, when the Interstellar Drive is operating. When we snapped out of the Drive and came in for our landing we sent out a distress call—but we couldn't say where we were. Furthermore, we don't know that the call was received . . ."

"Miss Taylor," said Boyle huffily. "Mr. Hawkins. I would remind you that I am the duly elected president of this council. There will be time for a general discussion later.

"As most of you may already have assumed, the age of this planet, biologically speaking, corresponds roughly with that of Earth during the Carboniferous Era. As we already know, no species yet exists to challenge our supremacy. By the time such a species does emerge—something analogous to the giant lizards of Earth's Triassic Era—we should be well established . . ."

"*We shall be dead!*" called one of the men.

"*We shall be dead,*" agreed the doctor, "but our descendants will be very much alive. We have to decide how to give them as good a start as possible. Language we shall bequeath to them . . ."

"Never mind the language, Doc," called the other woman member. She was a small blonde, slim, with a hard face. "It's just this question of descendants that I'm here to look after. I represent

the women of child-bearing age—there are, as you must know, fifteen of us here. Can you, as a medical man, guarantee—bearing in mind that you have no drugs, no instruments—safe deliveries? Can you guarantee that our children will have a good chance of survival?”

Boyle dropped his pomposity like a worn-out garment.

“I’ll be frank,” he said. “I have not, as you, Miss Hart, have pointed out, either drugs or instruments. But I can assure you, Miss Hart, that your chances of a safe delivery are far better than they would have been on Earth during, say, the Eighteenth Century. And I’ll tell you why. On this planet, so far as we know, and we have been here long enough now to find out the hard way, there exist no micro-organisms harmful to man. Did such organisms exist, the bodies of those of us still surviving would be, by this time, mere masses of suppuration. Most of us, of course, would have died of septicemia long ago. And that, I think, answers *both* your questions.”

“I haven’t finished yet,” she said. “Here’s another point. There are fifty-three of us here, men and women. There are ten married couples—so we’ll count them out. That leaves thirty-three people, of whom twenty are men. Twenty men to thirteen women. All of us aren’t young—but we’re all of

us women. What sort of marriage set-up do we have? Monogamy? Polyandry?”

“Monogamy, of course,” said a tall, thin man sharply. He was the only one of those present who wore clothing—if so it could be called. The disintegrating fronds lashed around his waist with a strand of vine did little to serve any useful purpose.

“All right, then,” said the girl. “Monogamy. I’d rather prefer it that way myself. But I warn you that if that’s the way we play it there’s going to be trouble. And in any murder involving passion and jealousy the woman is as liable to be a victim as either of the men—and I don’t want *that*!”

“What do you propose, then, Miss Hart?” asked Boyle.

“Just this, Doc. When it comes to our matings we leave love out of it. If two men want to marry the same woman—then let them fight it out. The best man gets the girl—and keeps her.”

“Natural selection . . .” murmured the surgeon. “I’m in favour—but we must put it to the vote.”

At the crest of the low hill was a shallow depression, a natural arena. Round the rim sat the castaways—all but four of them. One of the four was Doctor Boyle—he had discovered that his duties as president embraced those of a referee; it had been held that he was best competent

to judge when one of the contestants was liable to suffer permanent damage. Another of the four was the girl, Mary Hart. She had found a serrated twig with which to comb her long hair, she had contrived a wreath of yellow flowers—which she was holding—with which to crown the victor. Was it, wondered Hawkins as he sat with the other council members, a hankering after an Earthly wedding ceremony, or was it a harking back to something older and darker?

"A pity that these blasted moulds got our watches," said the fat man on Hawkins' right. "If we had any means of telling the time we could have rounds, make a proper prize fight of it."

Hawkins nodded. He looked at the four in the centre of the arena—at the strutting, barbaric woman, at the pompous old man, at the two dark-bearded young men with their glistening white bodies. He knew them both—Fennet had been Senior Cadet of the ill-fated *Lode Star*; Clemens, at least seven years Fennet's senior, was a passenger, had been a prospector on the frontier worlds.

"If we had anything to bet with," said the fat man happily, "I'd lay it on Clemens. That cadet of yours hasn't a snowball's chance in hell. He's been brought up to fight clean—Clemens has been brought up to fight dirty."

"Fennet's in better condition," said Hawkins. "He's been taking exercise, while Clemens has just been laying around sleeping and eating. Look at the paunch on him!"

"There's nothing wrong with good, healthy flesh and muscle," said the fat man, patting his own paunch.

"No gouging, no biting!" called the doctor. "And may the best man win!"

He stepped back smartly away from the contestants, stood with the Hart woman.

There was an air of embarrassment about the pair of gladiators as they stood there, each with his fists hanging at his sides. They seemed to be waiting for something.

"Go on!" screamed Mary Hart at last. "Don't you want me? You'll live to a ripe old age here—and it'll be lonely with no woman!"

"They can always wait around until your daughters grow up, Mary!" shouted one of her friends.

"If I ever have any daughters!" she called. "I shan't at this rate!"

"Go on!" shouted the crowd. "Go on!"

Fennet made a start. He stepped forward almost diffidently, dabbed with his right fist at Clemens' unprotected face. It wasn't a hard blow, but it must have been painful. Clemens put his hand up to his nose, brought it

away and stared at the bright blood staining it. He growled, lumbered forward with arms open to hug and crush. The cadet danced back, scoring twice more with his right.

"Why doesn't he *hit* him?" demanded the fat man.

"And break every bone in his fist? They aren't wearing gloves, you know," said Hawkins.

Fennet decided to make a stand. He stood firm, his feet slightly apart, and brought his right into play once more. This time he left his opponent's face alone, went for his belly instead. Hawkins was surprised to see that the prospector was taking the blows with apparent equanimity—he must be, he decided, much tougher in actuality than in appearance.

The cadet sidestepped smartly—and slipped on the wet grass. Clemens fell heavily onto his opponent—Hawkins could hear the *whoosh* as the air was forced from the lad's lungs. The prospector's thick arms encircled Fennet's body—and Fennet's knee came up viciously to Clemens' groin. The prospector squealed, but hung on grimly. One of his hands was around Fennet's throat now, and the other one, its fingers viciously hooked, was clawing for the cadet's eyes.

"No gouging!" Boyle was screaming. "No gouging!"

He dropped down onto his

knees, caught Clemens' thick wrist with both hands.

Something made Hawkins look up.

Hovering above the arena was a helicopter. There was something about the design of it, a subtle oddness, that told Hawkins that this was no Earthly machine. Suddenly, from its smooth, shining belly, dropped a net, seemingly of dull metal. It enveloped the struggling figures on the ground, trapped the doctor and Mary Hart.

Hawkins shouted—a wordless cry. He jumped to his feet, ran to the assistance of his ensnared companions. The net seemed to be alive. It twisted itself around his wrists, bound his ankles. Others of the castaways rushed to aid Hawkins.

"Keep away!" he shouted. "Scatter!"

The low drone of the helicopter's rotors rose in pitch. The machine lifted. In an incredibly short space of time the arena was, to the first mate's eyes, no more than a pale green saucer in which little white ants scurried aimlessly. Then the flying machine was above and through the base of the low clouds, and there was nothing to be seen but drifting whiteness.

When, at last, it made its descent, Hawkins was not surprised to see the silvery tower of a great spaceship standing among the low trees on a level plateau.

The world to which they were taken would have been a marked improvement on the world they had left, had it not been for the mistaken kindness of their captors. The cage in which the three men were housed duplicated, with remarkable fidelity, the climatic conditions of the planet upon which *Lode Star* had been lost. It was glassed in, and from sprinklers in its roof fell a steady drizzle of warm water. A couple of dispirited tree ferns provided little shelter from the depressing precipitation. Twice a day a hatch at the back of the cage—this was made of a sort of concrete—opened, and slabs of a fungus remarkably similar to that on which they had been subsisting were thrown in. There was a hole in the floor of the cage—this the prisoners rightly assumed was for sanitary purposes.

On either side of them there were other cages. In one of them was Mary Hart—alone. She could gesture to them, wave to them, and that was all. The cage on the other side held a beast built on the same general lines as a lobster, but with a strong hint of squid. Across the broad roadway they could see other cages, but could not see what they housed.

Hawkins, Boyle and Fennet sat on the damp floor and stared through the thick glass and the bars at the beings outside who stared at them.

"If only they were humanoid," sighed the doctor. "If only they were the same shape as us we might make a start towards convincing them that we, too, are intelligent beings."

"They aren't the same shape," said Hawkins. "And we, were the situations reversed, would take some convincing that three six-legged beer barrels were men and brothers . . . Try Pythagoras' Theorem again," he said to the cadet.

Without enthusiasm the youth broke fronds from the nearest tree-fern. He broke them into smaller pieces, then on the mossy floor laid them out in the design of a right-angled triangle with squares constructed on all three sides. The natives—a large one, one slightly smaller and a little one—regarded him incuriously with their flat, dull eyes. The large one put the tip of a tentacle into a pocket—the things wore clothing—and pulled out a brightly coloured packet, handed it to the little one. The little one tore off the wrapping, started stuffing pieces of some bright blue confection into the slot on its upper side that, obviously, served it as a mouth.

"I wish they were allowed to feed the animals," sighed Hawkins. "I'm sick of that damned fungus."

"Let's recapitulate," said the doctor. "After all, we've nothing else to do. We were taken from

our camp by the helicopter—six of us. We were taken to the survey ship—a vessel that seemed in no way superior to our own interstellar ships. You assure us, Hawkins, that the ship used the Ehrenhaft Drive or something so near to it as to be its twin brother?”

“Correct,” agreed Hawkins.

“On the ship we’re kept in separate cages. There’s no ill treatment, we’re fed and watered at frequent intervals. We land on this strange planet, but we see nothing of it. We’re hustled out of cages like so many cattle into a covered van. We know that we’re being driven *somewhere*, that’s all. The van stops, the door opens and a couple of these animated beer barrels poke in poles with smaller editions of those fancy nets on the end of them. They catch Clemens and Miss Taylor, drag them out. We never see them again. The rest of us spend the night and the following day and night in individual cages. The next day we’re taken to this—zoo.”

“Do you think that they were vivisected?” asked Fennet. “I never liked Clemens, but . . .”

“I’m afraid they were,” said Boyle. “Our captors must have learned of the difference between the sexes by it. Unluckily, there’s no way of determining intelligence by vivisection . . .”

“The filthy brutes!” shouted the cadet.

“Easy, son,” counselled Hawkins. “You can’t blame them, you know. We’ve vivisected animals a lot more like us than we are to these things.”

“The problem,” the doctor went on, “is to convince these things—as you call them, Hawkins—that we are rational beings like themselves. How would they define a rational being? How would we define a rational being?”

“Somebody who knows Pythagoras’ Theorem,” said the cadet sulkily.

“I read somewhere,” said Hawkins, “that the history of man is the history of the fire-making, tool-using animal . . .”

“Then make fire,” suggested the doctor. “Make us some tools, and use them.”

“Don’t be silly. You know that there’s not an artifact among the bunch of us. No false teeth even—not even a metal filling. Even so . . .” He paused. “When I was a youngster there was, among the cadets in the interstellar ships, a revival of the old arts and crafts. We considered ourselves in a direct line of descent from the old windjammer sailormen, so we learned how to splice rope and wire, how to make sennit and fancy knots and all the rest of it. Then one of us hit on the idea of basket-making. We were in a passenger ship, and we used to make our baskets secretly, daub them with violent

colours and then sell them to passengers as genuine souvenirs from the Lost Planet of Arcturus VI. There was a most distressing scene when the Old Man and the Mate found out . . .”

“What are you driving at?” asked the doctor.

“Just this. We will demonstrate our manual dexterity by the weaving of baskets—I’ll teach you how.”

“It might work . . .” said Boyle slowly. “It might just work . . . On the other hand—don’t forget that certain birds and animals do the same sort of thing. On Earth there’s the beaver who builds quite cunning dams. There’s the bower bird, who makes a bower for his mate as part of the courtship ritual . . .”

The Head Keeper must have known of creatures whose courting habits resembled those of the Terran bower bird. After three days of feverish basket-making—which consumed all the bedding and stripped the tree-ferns—Mary Hart was taken from her cage and put in with the three men. After she had got over her hysterical pleasure at having somebody to talk to again she was rather indignant.

It was good, thought Hawkins drowsily, to have Mary with them. A few more days of solitary confinement must surely have driven the girl crazy. Even so,

having Mary in the same cage had its drawbacks. He, Hawkins, had to keep a watchful eye on young Fennet. He even had to keep a watchful eye on Boyle—the old goat!

Mary screamed.

Hawkins jerked into complete wakefulness. He could see the pale form of Mary—on this world it was never completely dark at night—and, on the other side of the cage, the forms of Fennet and Boyle. He got hastily to his feet, stumbled to the girl’s side.

“What is it?” he asked.

“I . . . I don’t know . . . Something small, with sharp claws . . . It ran over me . . .”

“Oh,” said Hawkins, “that was only Joe . . .”

“Joe?” she demanded.

“I don’t know exactly what he—or she—is,” said the man.

“I think he’s definitely *he*,” said the doctor.

“What *is* Joe?” she asked again.

“He must be the local equivalent of a mouse,” said the doctor, “although he looks nothing like one. He comes up through the floor somewhere to look for scraps of food. We’re trying to tame him . . .”

“You encourage the brute?” she screamed. “I demand that you do something about him—at once! Poison him, or trap him. Now!”

“Tomorrow,” said Hawkins.

“Now!” she screamed.

"Tomorrow," said Hawkins firmly.

The capture of Joe proved to be easy. Two flat baskets, hinged like the valves of an oyster shell, made the trap. There was bait inside—a large piece of the fungus. There was a cunningly arranged upright that would fall at the least tug at the bait. Hawkins, lying sleepless on his damp bed, heard the tiny click and thud that told him that the trap had been sprung. He heard Joe's indignant chitterings, heard the tiny claws scrabbling at the stout basket work.

Mary Hart was asleep. He shook her.

"We've caught him," he said.

"Then kill him," she answered drowsily.

But Joe was not killed. The three men were rather attached to him. With the coming of daylight they transferred him to a cage that Hawkins had fashioned. Even the girl relented when she saw the harmless ball of multi-coloured fur bouncing indignantly up and down in its prison. She insisted on feeding the little animal, exclaimed gleefully when the thin tentacles reached out and took the fragment of fungus from her fingers and lowered it into the mouth slot.

For three days they made much of their pet. On the fourth day, beings whom they took to be

keepers, entered the cage with their nets, immobilised the occupants, then departed, taking with them Joe and Hawkins.

"I'm afraid it's hopeless," Boyle said. "He's gone the same way as the others."

"They'll have him stuffed and mounted in some museum," said Fennet glumly.

"No," said the girl. "They couldn't!"

"They could," said the doctor.

Abruptly, the hatch at the back of the cage opened.

Before the three humans could retreat to the scant protection supplied by a corner, a voice called: "It's all right, come on out!"

Hawkins walked into the cage. He was shaved, and the beginnings of a healthy tan had darkened the pallor of his skin. He was wearing a pair of trunks fashioned from some bright red material.

"Come on out," he said again. "Our hosts have apologised very sincerely, and they have more suitable accommodation prepared for us. Then, as soon as they have a ship ready, we're to go to pick up the other survivors."

"Not so fast," said Boyle. "Put us in the picture, will you? What made them realise that we were rational beings?"

Hawkins' face darkened.

"Only rational beings," he said, "put other beings in cages."

It's Such a Beautiful Day

By ISAAC ASIMOV

The Doors had solved the transportation problem for all time. Had solved it perhaps too well. It took a rebel to discover the price humanity was paying for ease in getting from one place to another.





ON APRIL 12, 2117, THE field-modulator brake valve in the Door belonging to Mrs. Richard Hanshaw depolarized for reasons unknown. As a result, Mrs. Hanshaw's day was completely upset and her son, Richard, Jr., first developed his strange neurosis.

IT'S SUCH A BEAUTIFUL DAY

It was not the type of thing you would find listed as a neurosis in the usual textbooks and certainly young Richard behaved, in most respects, just as a well-brought-up twelve-year-old in prosperous circumstances ought to behave.

And yet from April 12 on,

Richard Hanshaw, Jr., could only with regret ever persuade himself to go through a Door.

Of all this, on April 12, Mrs. Hanshaw had no premonition. She woke in the morning (an ordinary morning) as her mekkano slithered gently into her room, with a cup of coffee on a small tray. Mrs. Hanshaw was planning a visit to New York in the afternoon and she had several things to do first that could not quite be trusted to a mekkano, so after one or two sips, she stepped out of bed.

The mekkano backed away, moving silently along the diamagnetic field that kept its oblong body half an inch above the floor, and moved back to the kitchen, where its simple computer was quite adequate to set the proper controls on the various kitchen appliances in order that an appropriate breakfast might be prepared.

Mrs. Hanshaw, having bestowed the usual sentimental glance upon the cubograph of her dead husband, passed through the stages of her morning ritual with a certain contentment. She could hear her son across the hall clattering through his, but she knew she need not interfere with him. The mekkano was well adjusted to see to it, as a matter of course, that he was showered, that he had on a change of

clothing, and that he would eat a nourishing breakfast. The Tergo-shower she had had installed the year before made the morning wash and dry so quick and pleasant that, really, she felt certain Dickie would wash even without supervision.

On a morning like this, when she was busy, it would certainly not be necessary for her to do more than deposit a casual peck on the boy's cheek before he left. She heard the soft chime the mekkano sounded to indicate approaching school time and she floated down the force-lift to the lower floor (her hair-style for the day only sketchily designed, as yet) in order to perform that motherly duty.

She found Richard standing at the Door, with his text-reels and pocket projector dangling by their strap and a frown on his face.

"Say, Mom," he said, looking up, "I dialed the school's co-ords but nothing happens."

She said, almost automatically: "Nonsense, Dickie. I never heard of such a thing."

"Well, you try."

Mrs. Hanshaw tried a number of times. Strange, the school Door was always set for general reception. She tried other co-ordinates. Her friends' Doors might not be set for reception, but there would be a signal at least, and then she could explain.

But nothing happened at all.

The Door remained an inactive grey barrier despite all her manipulations. It was obvious that the Door was out of order—and only five months after its annual fall inspection by the company.

She was quite angry about it.

It *would* happen on a day when she had much planned. She thought petulantly of the fact that a month earlier she had decided against installing a subsidiary Door on the ground that it was an unnecessary expense. How was she to know that Doors were getting to be so *shoddy*?

She stepped to the visiphone while the anger still burned in her, and said to Richard: "You just go down the road, Dickie, and use the Williamsons' Door."

Ironically, in view of later developments, Richard balked. "Aw, gee, Mom, I'll get dirty. Can't I stay home till the Door is fixed?"

And, as ironically, Mrs. Hanshaw insisted. With her finger on the combination board of the phone, she said: "You won't get dirty if you put flexies on your shoes, and don't forget to brush yourself well before you go into their house."

"But, golly——"

"No back-talk, Dickie. You've got to be in school. Just let me see you walk out of here. And quickly, or you'll be late."

The mekkano, an advanced

model and very responsive, was already standing before Richard with flexies in one appendage.

Richard pulled the transparent plastic shields over his shoes and moved down the hall with visible reluctance. "I don't even know how to work this thing, Mom."

"You just push that button," Mrs. Hanshaw called. "The red button. Where it says 'For Emergency Use.' And don't dawdle. Do you want the mekkano to go along with you?"

"Gosh, no," he called back, morosely. "What do you think I am? A baby? Gosh!" His muttering was cut off by a slam.

With flying fingers, Mrs. Hanshaw punched the appropriate combination on the phone board and thought of the things she intended saying to the company about this.

Joe Bloom, a reasonably young man, who had gone through technology school with added training in force-field mechanics, was at the Hanshaw residence in less than half an hour. He was really quite competent, though Mrs. Hanshaw regarded his youth with deep suspicion.

She opened the movable house-panel when he first signalled and her sight of him was as he stood there, brushing at himself vigorously to remove the dust of the open air. He took off his flexies and dropped them where he

stood. Mrs. Hanshaw closed the house-panel against the flash of raw sunlight that had entered. She found herself irrationally hoping that the step-by-step trip from the public Door had been an unpleasant one. Or perhaps that the public Door itself had been out of order and the youth had had to lug his tools even farther than the necessary two hundred yards. She wanted the Company, or its representative at least, to suffer a bit. It would teach them what broken Doors meant.

But he seemed cheerful and unperturbed as he said: "Good morning, ma'am. I came to see about your Door."

"I'm glad someone did," said Mrs. Hanshaw, ungraciously. "My day is quite ruined."

"Sorry, ma'am. What seems to be the trouble?"

"It just won't work. Nothing at all happens when you adjust co-ords," said Mrs. Hanshaw. "There was no warning at all. I had to send my son out to the neighbours through that—that thing."

She pointed to the entrance through which the repair man had come.

He smiled and spoke out of the conscious wisdom of his own specialized training in Doors. "That's a door, too, ma'am. You don't give that kind a capital letter when you write it. It's a

hand-door, sort of. It used to be the only kind once."

"Well, at least it works. My boy's had to go out in the dirt and germs."

"It's not bad outside today, ma'am," he said, with the connoisseur-like air of one whose profession forced him into the open nearly every day. "Sometimes it *is* real unpleasant. But I guess you want I should fix this here Door, ma'am, so I'll get on with it."

He sat down on the floor, opened the large tool case he had brought in with him, and in half a minute, by use of a point-de-magnetizer, he had the control panel removed and a set of intricate vitals exposed.

He whistled to himself as he placed the fine electrodes of the field-analyser on numerous points, studying the shifting needles on the dials. Mrs. Hanshaw watched him, arms folded.

Finally, he said: "Well, here's something," and with a deft twist, he disengaged the brake-valve.

He tapped it with a fingernail and said: "This here brake-valve is depolarized, ma'am. There's your whole trouble." He ran his finger along the little pigeonholes in his tool case and lifted out a duplicate of the object he had taken from the door mechanism. "These things just go all of a sudden. Can't predict it."

He put the control panel back and stood up. "It'll work now, ma'am."

He punched a reference combination, blanked it, then punched another. Each time, the dull grey of the Door gave way to a deep, velvety blackness. He said: "Will you sign here, ma'am? And put down your charge number, too, please? Thank you, ma'am."

He punched a new combination, that of his home factory, and with a polite touch of finger to forehead, he stepped through the Door. As his body entered the blackness, it cut off sharply. Less and less of him was visible and the tip of his tool case was the last thing that showed. A second after he had passed through completely, the Door turned back to dull grey.

Half an hour later, when Mrs. Hanshaw had finally completed her interrupted preparations and was fuming over the misfortune of the morning, the phone buzzed annoyingly and her real troubles began.

Miss Elizabeth Robbins was distressed. Little Dick Hanshaw had always been a good pupil. She hated to report him like this. And yet, she told herself, his actions were certainly queer. And she would talk to his mother, not to the principal.

She slipped out to the phone during the morning study period,

leaving a student in charge. She made her connection and found herself staring at Mrs. Hanshaw's handsome and somewhat formidable head.

Miss Robbins quailed, but it was too late to turn back. She said, diffidently: "Mrs. Hanshaw, I'm Miss Robbins." She ended on a rising note.

Mrs. Hanshaw looked blank, then said: "Richard's teacher?" That, too, ended on a rising note.

"That's right. I called you, Mrs. Hanshaw," Miss Robbins plunged right into it, "to tell you that Dick was quite late to school this morning."

"He *was*? But that couldn't be. I saw him leave."

Miss Robbins looked astonished. She said: "You mean you saw him use the Door?"

Mrs. Hanshaw said quickly: "Well, no. Our Door was temporarily out of order. I sent him to a neighbour and he used that Door."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. I wouldn't lie to you."

"No, no, Mrs. Hanshaw. I wasn't implying that at all. I meant are you sure he found the way to the neighbour? He might have got lost."

"Ridiculous. We have the proper maps, and I'm sure Richard knows the location of every house in District A-3." Then, with the quiet pride of

one who knows what is her due, she added: "Not that he ever needs to know, of course. The co-ords are all that are necessary at any time."

Miss Robbins, who came from a family that had always had to economize rigidly on the use of its Doors (the price of power being what it was) and who had, therefore, run errands on foot until quite an advanced age, resented the pride. She said, quite clearly: "Well, I'm afraid, Mrs. Hanshaw, that Dick did not use the neighbour's Door. He was over an hour late to school and the condition of his flexies made it quite obvious that he tramped cross-country. They were *muddy*."

"*Muddy*?" Mrs. Hanshaw repeated the emphasis on the word. "What did he say? What was his excuse?"

Miss Robbins couldn't help but feel a little glad at the discomfiture of the other woman. She said: "He wouldn't talk about it. Frankly, Mrs. Hanshaw, he seems ill. That's why I called you. Perhaps you might want to have a doctor look at him."

"Is he running a temperature?" The mother's voice went shrill.

"Oh, no. I don't mean physically ill. It's just his attitude and the look in his eyes." She hesitated, then said, with every attempt at delicacy: "I thought perhaps a

routine check-up with a psychic probe——"

She didn't finish. Mrs. Hanshaw, in a chilled voice and with what was as close to a snort as her breeding would permit, said: "Are you implying that Richard is *neurotic*?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Hanshaw, but——"

"It certainly sounded so. The idea! He has always been perfectly healthy. I'll take this up with him when he gets home. I'm sure there's a perfectly normal explanation which he'll give to *me*."

The connection broke abruptly, and Miss Robbins felt hurt and uncommonly foolish. After all she had only tried to help, to fulfil what she considered an obligation to her students.

She hurried back to the classroom with a glance at the metal face of the wall clock. The study period was drawing to an end. English Composition next.

But her mind wasn't completely on English Composition. Automatically, she called the students to have them read selections from their literary creations. And occasionally she punched one of those selections on tape and ran it through the small vocalizer to show the students how English *should* be read.

The vocalizer's mechanical voice, as always, dripped perfection, but, again as always,

lacked character. Sometimes, she wondered if it was wise to try to train the students into a speech that was divorced from individuality and geared only to a mass-average accent and intonation.

Today, however, she had no thought for that. It was Richard Hanshaw she watched. He sat quietly in his seat, quite obviously indifferent to his surroundings. He was lost deep in himself and just not the same boy he had been. It was obvious to her that he had had some unusual experience that morning and, really, she was right to call his mother, although perhaps she ought not to have made the remark about the probe. Still, it was quite the thing these days. All sorts of people got probed. There wasn't any disgrace attached to it. Or there shouldn't be, anyway.

She called on Richard, finally. She had to call twice, before he responded and rose to his feet.

The general subject assigned had been: "If you had your choice of travelling on some ancient vehicle, which would you choose, and why?" Miss Robbins tried to use the topic every semester. It was a good one because it carried a sense of history with it. It forced the youngster to think about the manner of living of people in past ages.

She listened while Richard Hanshaw read in a low voice.

"If I had my choice of ancient vehicles," he said, pronouncing the "h" in vehicles, "I would choose the stratoliner. It travels slow like all vehicles but it is clean. Because it travels in the stratosphere, it must be all enclosed so that you are not likely to catch disease. You can see the stars if it is night time almost as good as in a planetarium. If you look down you can see the Earth like a map or maybe see clouds——" He went on for several hundred more words.

She said brightly, when he had finished reading: "It's pronounced vee-ick-ulls, Richard. No 'h.' Accent on the first syllable. And you don't say 'travels slow' or 'see good.' What do you say, class?"

There was a small chorus of responses and she went on: "That's right. Now, what is the difference between an adjective and an adverb? Who can tell me?"

And so it went. Lunch passed. Some pupils stayed to eat; some went home. Richard stayed. Miss Robbins noted that, as usually he didn't.

The afternoon passed, too, and then there was the final bell and the usual upsurging hum as twenty-five boys and girls rattled their belongings together and took their leisurely place in line.

Miss Robbins clapped her hands together. "Quickly, children.

Come, Zelda, take your place."

"I dropped my tape-punch, Miss Robbins," shrilled the girl, defensively.

"Well, pick it up, pick it up. Now children, be brisk, be brisk."

She pushed the button that slid a section of the wall into a recess and revealed the grey blankness of a large Door. It was not the usual Door that the occasional student used in going home for lunch, but an advanced model that was one of the prides of this well-to-do private school.

In addition to its double width, it possessed a large and impressively gear-filled "automatic serial finder" which was capable of adjusting the Door for a number of different co-ordinates at automatic intervals.

At the beginning of the semester, Miss Robbins always had to spend an afternoon with the mechanic, adjusting the device for the co-ordinates of the homes of the new class. But then, thank goodness, it rarely needed attention for the remainder of the term.

The class lined up alphabetically, first girls, then boys. The door went velvety black and Hester Adams waved her hand and stepped through. "By-y-y——"

The "bye" was cut off in the middle, as it almost always was.

The door went grey, then black again, and Theresa Cantrocchi went through. Grey, black, Zelda Charlowicz. Grey, black,

Patricia Coombs. Grey, black, Sara May Evans.

The line grew smaller as the Door swallowed them one by one, depositing each in her home. Of course, an occasional mother forgot to leave the house Door on special reception at the appropriate time and then the school Door remained grey. Automatically, after a minute-long wait, the Door went on to the next combination in line and the pupil in question had to wait till it was all over, after which a phone call to the forgetful parent would set things right. This was always bad for the pupils involved, especially the sensitive ones, who took seriously the implication that they were little thought of at home. Miss Robbins always tried to impress this on visiting parents, but it happened at least once every semester just the same.

The girls were all through now. John Abramowitz stepped through and then Edwin Byrne——

Of course, another trouble, and a more frequent one was the boy or girl who got into line out of place. They *would* do it despite the teacher's sharpest watch, particularly at the beginning of the term when the proper order was less familiar to them.

When that happened, children would be popping into the wrong houses by the half-dozen and would have to be sent back. It always meant a mix-up that took

minutes to straighten out and parents were invariably irate.

Miss Robbins was suddenly aware that the line had stopped. She spoke sharply to the boy at the head of the line.

"Step through, Samuel. What are you waiting for?"

Samuel Jones raised a complacent countenance and said: "It's not my combination, Miss Robbins."

"Well, whose is it?" She looked impatiently down the line of five remaining boys. Who was out of place?

"It's Dick Hanshaw's, Miss Robbins."

"Where is he?"

Another boy answered, with the rather repulsive tone of self-righteousness all children automatically assume in reporting the deviations of their friends to elders in authority: "He went through the fire door, Miss Robbins."

"What?"

The schoolroom Door had passed on to another combination and Samuel Jones passed through. One by one, the rest followed.

Miss Robbins was alone in the classroom. She stepped to the fire door. It was a small affair, manually operated, and hidden behind a bend in the wall so that it would not break up the uniform structure of the room.

She opened it a crack. It was there as a means of escape from

the building in case of fire, a device which was enforced by an anachronistic law that did not take into account the modern methods of automatic fire-fighting that all public buildings used. There was nothing outside, but the—outside. The sunlight was harsh and a dusty wind was blowing.

Miss Robbins closed the door. She was glad she had called Mrs. Hanshaw. She had done her duty. More than ever, it was obvious that something was wrong with Richard. She suppressed the impulse to phone again.

Mrs. Hanshaw did not go to New York that day. She remained home in a mixture of anxiety and an irrational anger, the latter directed against the impudent Miss Robbins.

Some fifteen minutes before school's end, her anxiety drove her to the Door. Last year she had had it equipped with an automatic device which activated it to the school's co-ordinates at five of three and kept it so, barring manual adjustment, until Richard arrived.

Her eyes were fixed on the Door's dismal grey (why couldn't an inactive force-field be any other colour, something more lively and cheerful?) and waited. Her hands felt cold as she squeezed them together.

The Door turned black at the precise second but nothing hap-

pened. The minutes passed and Richard was late. Then quite late. Then very late.

It was a quarter of four and she was distracted. Normally, she would have phoned the school, but she couldn't, she couldn't. Not after that teacher had deliberately cast doubts on Richard's mental well-being. How could she?

Mrs. Hanshaw moved about restlessly, lighting a cigarette with fumbling fingers, then smudging it out. Could it be something quite normal? Could Richard be staying after school for some reason? Surely he would have told her in advance. A gleam of light struck her; he knew she was planning to go to New York and might not be back till late in the evening—

No, he would surely have told her. Why fool herself?

Her pride was breaking. She would have to call the school, or even (she closed her eyes and teardrops squeezed through between the lashes) the police.

And when she opened her eyes, Richard stood before her, eyes on the ground and his whole bearing that of someone waiting for a blow to fall.

"Hello, Mom"

Mrs. Hanshaw's anxiety transmuted itself instantly (in a manner known only to mothers) into anger. "Where have you been, Richard?"

And then, before she could go further into the refrain concerning careless, unthinking sons and broken-hearted mothers, she took note of his appearance in greater detail, and gasped in utter horror.

She said: "You've been in the open."

Her son looked down at his dusty shoes (minus flexies), at the dirt marks that streaked his lower arms and at the small but definite tear in his shirt. He said: "Gosh, Mom, I just thought I'd—" and he faded out.

She said: "Was there anything wrong with the school Door?"

"No, Mom."

"Do you realize I've been worried sick about you?" She waited vainly for an answer. "Well, I'll talk to you afterward, young man. First, you're taking a bath, and every stitch of your clothing is being thrown out. Mekkano!"

But the mekkano had already reacted properly to the phrase "taking a bath" and was off to the bathroom in its silent glide.

"You take your shoes off right here," said Mrs. Hanshaw, "then march after mekkano."

Richard did as he was told with a resignation that placed him beyond futile protest.

Mrs. Hanshaw picked up the soiled shoes between thumb and forefinger and dropped them down the disposal chute, which hummed in faint dismay at the unexpected

load. She dusted her hands carefully on a tissue which she allowed to float down the chute after the shoes.

She did not join Richard at dinner but let him eat in the worse-than-lack-of-company of the mekkano. This, she thought, would be an active sign of her displeasure and would do more than any amount of scolding or punishment to make him realize that he had done wrong. Richard, she frequently told herself, was a sensitive boy.

But she went up to see him at bedtime.

She smiled at him and spoke softly. She thought that would be the best way. After all, he had been punished already.

She said: "What happened today, Dickie-boy?" She had called him that when he was a baby and just the sound of the name softened her nearly to tears.

But he only looked away and his voice was stubborn and cold. "I just don't like to go through those darn doors, Mom."

"But why ever not?"

He shuffled his hands over the filmy sheet (fresh, clean, antiseptic and, of course, disposable after each use) and said: "I just don't like them."

"But then how do you expect to go to school, Dickie?"

"I'll get up early," he mumbled.

"But there's nothing wrong with Doors."

"Don't like 'em." He never once looked up at her.

She said, despairingly: "Oh, well, you have a good sleep and tomorrow morning, you'll feel much better."

She kissed him and left the room, automatically passing her hand through the photo-cell beam and in that manner dimming the room lights.

But she had trouble sleeping herself that night. Why should Dickie dislike Doors so suddenly? They had never bothered him before. To be sure, the Door had broken down in the morning, but that should make him appreciate them all the more.

Dickie was behaving unreasonably.

Unreasonably? That reminded her of Miss Robbins and her diagnosis and Mrs. Hanshaw's soft jaw set in the darkness and privacy of her bedroom. Nonsense! The boy was upset and a night's sleep was all the therapy he needed.

But the next morning when she arose, her son was not in the house. The mekkano could not speak but it could answer questions with gestures of its appendages equivalent to a yes or no, and it did not take Mrs. Hanshaw more than half a minute to ascertain that the boy had risen thirty minutes earlier than usual, skimped

his shower, and darted out of the house.

But not by way of the Door.

Out the other way—through the door. Small “d.”

Mrs. Hanshaw’s visiphone signalled genteelly at 3.10 p.m. that day. Mrs. Hanshaw guessed the caller and having activated the receiver, saw that she had guessed correctly. A quick glance in the mirror to see that she was properly calm after a day of abstracted concern and worry and then she keyed in her own transmission.

“Yes, Miss Robbins,” she said coldly.

Richard’s teacher was a bit breathless. She said: “Mrs. Hanshaw, Richard has deliberately left through the fire door although I told him to use the regular Door. I do not know where he went.”

Mrs. Hanshaw said, carefully: “He left to come home.”

Miss Robbins looked dismayed: “Do you approve of this?”

Pale-faced, Mrs. Hanshaw set about putting the teacher in her place. “I don’t think it is up to you to criticise. If my son does not choose to use the Door, it is his affair and mine. I don’t think there is any school ruling that would force him to use the Door, is there?” Her bearing quite plainly intimated that if there were she would see to it that it was changed.

Miss Robbins flushed and had time for one quick remark before contact was broken. She said: “I’d have him probed. I really would.”

Mrs. Hanshaw remained standing before the quartzinium plate, staring blindly at its blank face. Her sense of family placed her for a few moments quite firmly on Richard’s side. Why *did* he have to use the Door if he chose not to? And then she settled down to wait and pride battled the gnawing anxiety that something after all was wrong with Richard.

He came home with a look of defiance on his face, but his mother, with a strenuous effort of self-control, met him as though nothing were out of the ordinary.

For weeks, she followed that policy. It’s nothing, she told herself. It’s a vagary. He’ll grow out of it.

It grew into an almost normal state of affairs. Then, too, every once in a while, perhaps three days in a row, she would come down to breakfast to find Richard waiting sullenly at the Door, then using it when school time came. She always refrained from commenting on the matter.

Always, when he did that, and especially when he followed it up by arriving home via the Door, her heart grew warm and she thought, “Well, it’s over.” But always with the passing of one

day, two or three, he would return like an addict to his drug and drift silently out by the door—small “d”—before she woke.

And each time she thought despairingly of psychiatrists and probes, and each time the vision of Miss Robbins’ low-bred satisfaction at (possibly) learning of it, stopped her, although she was scarcely aware that that was the true motive.

Meanwhile, she lived with it and made the best of it. The mekkano was instructed to wait at the door—small “d”—with a Tergo kit and a change of clothing. Richard washed and changed without resistance. His underthings, socks and flexies were disposable in any case, and Mrs. Hanshaw bore uncomplainingly the expense of daily disposal of shirts. Trousers she finally allowed to go a week before disposal on condition of rigorous nightly cleansing.

One day she suggested that Richard accompany her on a trip to New York. It was more a vague desire to keep him in sight than part of any purposeful plan. He did not object. He was even happy. He stepped right through the Door, unconcerned. He didn’t hesitate. He even lacked the look of resentment he wore on those mornings he used the Door to go to school.

Mrs. Hanshaw rejoiced. This could be a way of weaning him

back into Door usage, and she racked her ingenuity for excuses to make trips with Richard. She even raised her power bill to quite unheard-of heights by suggesting, and going through with, a trip to Canton for the day in order to witness a Chinese festival.

That was on a Sunday, and the next morning Richard marched directly to the hole in the wall he always used. Mrs. Hanshaw, having wakened particularly early, witnessed that. For once, badgered past endurance, she called after him plaintively: “Why not the Door, Dickie?”

He said, briefly: “It’s all right for Canton,” and stepped out of the house.

So that plan ended in failure. And then, one day, Richard came home soaking wet. The mekkano hovered about him uncertainly and Mrs. Hanshaw, just returned from a four-hour visit with her sister in Iowa, cried: “Richard Hanshaw!”

He said, hang-dog fashion: “It started raining. All of a sudden, it started raining.”

For a moment, the word didn’t register with her. Her own school days and her studies of geography were twenty years in the past. And then she remembered and caught the vision of water pouring recklessly and endlessly down from the sky—a mad cascade of water with no tap to turn off,

no button to push, no contact to break.

She said: "And you stayed out in it?"

He said: "Well, gee, Mom, I came home fast as I could. I didn't know it was going to rain."

Mrs. Hanshaw had nothing to say. She was appalled and the sensation filled her too full for words to find a place.

Two days later, Richard found himself with a running nose, and a dry, scratchy throat. Mrs. Hanshaw had to admit that the virus of disease had found a lodging in her house, as though it were a miserable hovel of the Iron Age.

It was over that that her stubbornness and pride broke and she admitted to herself that, after all, Richard had to have psychiatric help.

Mrs. Hanshaw chose a psychiatrist with care. Her first impulse was to find one at a distance. For a while, she considered stepping directly into the San Francisco Medical Centre and choosing one at random.

And then it occurred to her that by doing that she would become merely an anonymous consultant. She would have no way of obtaining any greater consideration for herself than would be forthcoming to any public-Door user of the city slums. Now if she remained in her

own community, her word would carry weight——

She consulted the district map. It was one of that excellent series prepared by Doors, Inc., and distributed free of charge to their clients. Mrs. Hanshaw couldn't quite suppress that little thrill of civic pride as she unfolded the map. It wasn't a fine-print directory of Door co-ordinates only. It was an actual map, with each house carefully located.

And why not? District A-3 was a name of moment in the world, a badge of aristocracy. It was the first community on the planet to have been established on a completely Doored basis. The first, the largest, the wealthiest, the best-known. It needed no factories, no stores. It didn't even need roads. Each house was a little secluded castle, the Door of which had entry anywhere the world over where other Doors existed.

Carefully, she followed down the keyed listing of the five thousand families of District A-3. She knew it included several psychiatrists. The learned professions were well represented in A-3.

Doctor Hamilton Sloane was the second name she arrived at and her finger lingered upon the map. His office was scarcely two miles from the Hanshaw residence. She liked his name. The fact that he lived in A-3 was evidence of worth. And he was a neigh-

bour, practically a neighbour. He would understand that it was a matter of urgency—and confidential.

Firmly, she put in a call to his office to make an appointment.

Doctor Hamilton Sloane was a comparatively young man, not quite forty. He was of good family and he had indeed heard of Mrs. Hanshaw.

He listened to her quietly, and then said: "And this all began with the Door breakdown."

"That's right, doctor."

"Does he show any fear of the Doors?"

"Of course not. What an idea!" She was plainly startled.

"It's possible, Mrs. Hanshaw, it's possible. After all, when you stop to think of how a Door works it is rather a frightening thing, really. You step into a Door, and for an instant your atoms are converted into field-energies, transmitted to another part of space and re-converted into matter. For that instant you're not alive."

"I'm sure no one thinks of such things."

"But your son may. He witnessed the breakdown of the Door. He may be saying to himself: 'What if the Door breaks down just as I'm halfway through?'"

"But that's nonsense. He still uses the Door. He's even been

to Canton with me: Canton, China. And, as I told you, he uses it for school about once or twice a week."

"Freely? Cheerfully?"

"Well," said Mrs. Hanshaw, reluctantly, "he does seem a bit put out by it. But really, doctor, there isn't much use talking about it, is there? If you would do a quick probe, see where the trouble was," and she finished on a bright note, "why, that would be all. I'm sure it's quite a minor thing."

Dr. Sloane sighed. He detested the word "probe" and there was scarcely any word he heard oftener.

"Mrs. Hanshaw," he said patiently, "there is no such thing as a quick probe. Now I know the mag-strips are full of it and it's a rage in some circles, but it's much over-rated."

"Are you serious?"

"Quite. The probe is very complicated and the theory is that it traces mental circuits. You see, the cells of the brains are interconnected in a large variety of ways. Some of those interconnected paths are more used than others. They represent habits of thought, both conscious and unconscious. Theory has it that these paths in any given brain can be used to diagnose mental ills early and with certainty."

"Well, then?"

"But subjection to the probe is quite a fearful thing, especially to a child. It's a traumatic ex-

perience. It takes over an hour. And even then, the results must be sent to the Central Psycho-analytical Bureau for analysis, and that could take weeks. And, on top of all that, Mrs. Hanshaw, there are many psychiatrists who think the theory of probe-analyses to be most uncertain."

Mrs. Hanshaw compressed her lips. "You mean nothing can be done."

Dr. Sloane smiled. "Not at all. There were psychiatrists for centuries before there were probes. I suggest that you let me talk to the boy."

"Talk to him? Is that all?"

"I'll come to you for background information when necessary, but the essential thing, I think, is to talk to the boy."

"Really, Dr. Sloane, I doubt if he'll discuss the matter with you. He won't talk to me about it and I'm his mother."

"That often happens," the psychiatrist assured her. "A child will sometimes talk more readily to a stranger. In any case, I cannot take the case otherwise."

Mrs. Hanshaw rose, not at all pleased. "When can you come, doctor?"

"What about this coming Saturday? The boy won't be in school. Will you be busy?"

"We will be ready."

She made a dignified exit. Dr. Sloane accompanied her through

the small reception room to his office Door and waited while she punched the co-ordinates of her house. He watched her pass through. She became a half-woman, a quarter-woman, an isolated elbow and foot, a nothing.

It was frightening.

Did a Door ever break down during passage, leaving half a body here and half there? He had never heard of such a case, but he imagined it could happen.

He returned to his desk and looked up the time of his next appointment. It was obvious to him that Mrs. Hanshaw was annoyed and disappointed at not having arranged for a psychic probe treatment.

Why, for God's sake? Why should a thing like the probe, an obvious piece of quackery in his own opinion, get such a hold on the general public? It must be part of this general trend toward machines. Anything man can do, machines can do better. Machines! More machines! Machines for anything and everything! O tempora! O mores!

Oh, hell!

His resentment of the probe was beginning to bother him. Was it a fear of technological unemployment, a basic insecurity on his part, a mechanophobia, if that was the word—

He made a mental note to discuss this with his own analyst.

Dr. Sloane had to feel his way. The boy wasn't a patient who had come to him, more or less anxious to talk, more or less anxious to be helped.

Under the circumstances it would have been best to keep his first meeting with Richard short and non-committal. It would have been sufficient merely to establish himself as something less than a total stranger. The next time he would be someone Richard had seen before. The time after he would be an acquaintance, and after that, a friend of the family.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Hanshaw was not likely to accept a long-drawn-out process. She would go searching for a probe and, of course, she would find it.

And harm the boy. He was certain of that.

It was for that reason he felt he must sacrifice a little of the proper caution and risk a small crisis.

An uncomfortable ten minutes had passed when he decided he must try. Mrs. Hanshaw was smiling in a rather rigid way, eyeing him narrowly, as though she expected verbal magic from him. Richard wriggled in his seat, unresponsive to Dr. Sloane's tentative comments, overcome with boredom and unable not to show it.

Dr. Sloane said, with casual suddenness: "Would you like to take a walk with me, Richard?"

The boy's eyes widened and he stopped wriggling. He looked directly at Dr. Sloane. "A walk, sir?"

"I mean outside."

"Do you go—outside?"

"Sometimes. When I feel like it."

Richard was on his feet, holding down a squirming eagerness. "I didn't think anyone did."

"I do. And I like company."

The boy sat down, uncertainly. "Mom?—"

Mrs. Hanshaw had stiffened in her seat, her compressed lips radiating horror, but she managed to say: "Why, certainly, Dickie. But watch yourself."

And she managed a quick and baleful glare at Dr. Sloane.

In one respect, Dr. Sloane had lied. He did *not* go outside "sometimes." He hadn't been in the open since early college days. True, he had been athletically inclined (still was to some extent) but in his time the indoor ultra-violet chambers, swimming pools and tennis courts had flourished. For those with the price, they were much more satisfactory than the outdoor equivalents, open to the elements as they were, could possibly be. There was no occasion to go outside.

So there was a crawling sensation about his skin when he felt wind touch it, and he put down

his flexied shoes on bare grass with a gingerly movement.

"Hey, look at that." Richard was quite different now, laughing, his reserve broken down.

Dr. Sloane had time only to catch a flash of blue that ended in a tree. Leaves rustled and he lost it.

"What was it?"

"A bird," said Richard. "A blue kind of bird."

Dr. Sloane looked about him in amazement. The Hanshaw residence was on a rise of ground, and he could see for miles. The area was only lightly wooded and between clumps of trees, grass gleamed brightly in the sunlight.

Colours set in deeper green made red and yellow patterns. They were flowers. From the books he had viewed in the course of his lifetime and from the old video shows, he had learned enough so that all this had an eerie sort of familiarity.

And yet the grass was so trim, the flowers so patterned. Dimly, he realized he had been expecting something wilder. He said: "Who takes care of all this?"

Richard shrugged. "I dunno. Maybe the mekkanos do it."

"Mekkanos?"

"There's loads of them around. Sometimes they got a sort of atomic knife they hold near the ground. It cuts the grass. And they're always fooling around with

the flowers and things. There's one of them over there."

It was a small object, half a mile away. Its metal skin cast back highlights as it moved slowly over the gleaming meadow, engaged in some sort of activity that Dr. Sloane could not identify.

Dr. Sloane was astonished. Here it was a perverse sort of estheticism, a kind of conspicuous consumption—

"What's that?" he asked suddenly.

Richard looked. He said: "That's a house. Belongs to the Froehlichs. Co-ordinates, A-3, 23, 461. That little pointy building over there is the public Door."

Dr. Sloane was staring at the house. Was that what it looked like from the outside? Somehow he had imagined something much more cubic, and taller.

"Come along," shouted Richard, running ahead.

Dr. Sloane followed more sedately. "Do you know all the houses about here?"

"Just about."

"Where is A-23, 26, 475?" It was his own house, of course.

Richard looked about. "Let's see. Oh, sure, I know where it is—you see that water there?"

"Water?" Dr. Sloane made out a line of silver curving across the green.

"Sure. Real water. Just sort of running over rocks and things. It keeps running all the time. You

can get across it if you step on the rocks. It's called a river."

More like a creek, thought Dr. Sloane. He had studied geography, of course, but what passed for the subject these days was really economic and cultural geography. Physical geography was almost an extinct science except among specialists. Still, he knew what rivers and creeks were, in a theoretical sort of way.

Richard was still talking. "Well, just past the river, over that hill with the big clump of trees and down the other side a way is A-23, 26, 475. It's a light green house with a white roof."

"It is?" Dr. Sloane was genuinely astonished. He hadn't known it was green.

Some small animal disturbed the grass in its anxiety to avoid the oncoming feet. Richard looked after it and shrugged. "You can't catch them. I tried."

A butterfly flitted past, a wavering bit of yellow. Dr. Sloane's eyes followed it.

There was a low hum that lay over the fields, interspersed with an occasional harsh, calling sound, a rattle, a twittering, a chatter that rose, then fell. As his ear accustomed itself to listening, Dr. Sloane heard a thousand sounds, and none were man-made.

A shadow fell upon the scene, advancing towards him, covering him. It was suddenly cooler and he looked upward, startled.

Richard said: "It's just a cloud. It'll go away in a minute—look at these flowers. They're the kind that smell."

They were several hundred yards from the Hanshaw residence. The cloud passed and the sun shone once more. Dr. Sloane looked back and was appalled at the distance they had covered. If they moved out of sight of the house and if Richard ran off, would he be able to find his way back?

He pushed the thought away impatiently and looked out toward the line of water (nearer now) and past it to where his own house must be. He thought wonderingly: Light green?

He said: "You must be quite an explorer."

Richard said, with a shy pride: "When I go to school and come back, I always try to use a different route and see new things."

"But you don't go outside every morning, do you? Sometimes you use the Doors, I imagine."

"Oh, sure."

"Why is that, Richard?" Somehow, Dr. Sloane felt there might be significance in that point.

But Richard quashed him. With his eyebrows up and a look of astonishment on his face, he said: "Well, gosh, some mornings it rains and I *have* to use the Door. I hate that, but what can you do? About two weeks ago, I

got caught in the rain and I——” he looked about him automatically, and his voice sank to a whisper “——caught a cold, and wasn’t Mom upset, though.”

Dr. Sloane sighed: “Shall we go back now?”

There was a quick disappointment on Richard’s face. “Aw, what for?”

“You remind me that your mother must be waiting for us.”

“I guess so.” The boy turned reluctantly.

They walked slowly back. Richard was saying, chattily: “I wrote a composition at school once about how, if I could go on some ancient vehicle” (he pronounced it with exaggerated care) “I’d go in a stratoliner and look at stars and clouds and things. Oh, boy, I was sure nuts.”

“You’d pick something else now?”

“You bet. I’d go in an aut’m’bile, real slow. Then I’d see everything there was.”

Mrs. Hanshaw seemed troubled, uncertain. “You don’t think it’s abnormal, then, doctor?”

“Unusual, perhaps, but not abnormal. He likes the outside.”

“But how can he? It’s so dirty, so unpleasant.”

“That’s a matter of individual taste. A hundred years ago our ancestors were all outside most

of the time. Even today, I dare say there are a million Africans who have never seen a Door.”

“But Richard’s always been taught to behave himself the way a decent person in District A-3 is supposed to behave,” said Mrs. Hanshaw, fiercely. “Not like an African or—or an ancestor.”

“That may be part of the trouble, Mrs. Hanshaw. He feels this urge to go outside and yet he feels it to be wrong. He’s ashamed to talk about it to you or to his teacher. It forces him into sullen retreat and it could eventually be dangerous.”

“Then how can we persuade him to stop?”

Dr. Sloane said: “Don’t try. Channel the activity instead. The day your Door broke down, he was forced outside, found he liked it, and that set a pattern. He used the trip to school and back as an excuse to repeat that first exciting experience. Now, suppose you agree to let him out of the house for two hours on Saturdays and Sundays. Suppose he gets it through his head that, after all, he can go outside without necessarily having to go anywhere in the process. Don’t you think he’ll be willing to use the Door to go to school and back thereafter? And don’t you think that will stop the trouble he’s now having with his teacher and probably with his fellow-pupils?”

"But then will matters remain so? Must they? Won't he ever be normal again?"

Dr. Sloane rose to his feet. "Mrs. Hanshaw, he's as normal as need be right now. Right now, he's tasting the joys of the forbidden. If you co-operate with him, show that you don't disapprove, it will lose some of its attraction right there. Then, as he grows older, he will become more aware of the expectations and demands of society. He will learn to conform. After all, there is a little of the rebel in all of us, but it generally dies down as we grow old and tired. Unless, that is, it is unreasonably suppressed and allowed to build up pressure. Don't do that. Richard will be all right."

He walked to the Door.

Mrs. Hanshaw said: "And you

don't think a probe will be necessary, doctor?"

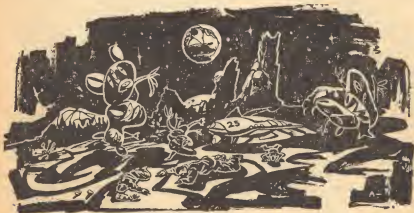
He turned and said, vehemently: "No, definitely not! There is nothing about the boy that requires it. Understand? Nothing."

His fingers hesitated an inch from the combination board and the expression on his face grew lowering.

"What's the matter, Dr. Sloane?" asked Mrs. Hanshaw.

But he didn't hear her because he was thinking of the Door and the psychic probe and all the rising, choking tide of machinery. There is a little of the rebel in all of us, he thought.

So he said in a soft voice, as his hand fell away from the board and his feet turned away from the Door: "You know, it's such a beautiful day that I think I'll walk."



BOOKS



SPACE, TIME AND NATHANIEL by Brian W. Aldiss. Faber and Faber, 12s. 6d., 208 pages.

This collection of fourteen stories plus one of the most readable introductions I have enjoyed for some time has, running throughout, the hallmark of science fiction and fantasy writing—imagination.

In the first section *T* is a quietly horrible story of the things which can be done to living matter, alien matter though it may be. *Our Kind of Knowledge* deals with sly ingeniousness with human-alien relations, while *Psychops* concerns itself with telepathy between a man and his unborn son. *Conviction* also deals with human-alien relations, with a sting in the tail which points a moral.

The second section deals with time and *Not For An Age* shows a peculiar kind of hell in which a man knows that he isn't really real but can't do anything about it.

The Shubshub Race is pure, zany fantasy and all the more delightful because of that. *Criminal Record* is just what the title implies, and *The Failed Men* is, to me, one of the best stories of this kind I have ever come across. The trick being, I think, not in the explanations, but the lack of them. My sympathies are all with the main character.

The third section deals with Nathaniel and other people, and consists of *Supercity*, *There Is A Tide*, more serious and, to me, not as satisfying as the rest. *Pogsmith*, a delightful tale of an old friend in science fiction, but this time handled with a difference. *Outside*, another quietly horrible story of a group of people none of whom, for some reason, ever goes outside, and of one of them who finally does go outside and what happened to him when he did. *Panel Game*, satiric ribaldry of an all-too-prevalent trend, and *Dumb Show*, a bitingly pathetic piece of writing skill.

Many of the stories you may have read in the past, but don't let that stop you from getting this book. As a short-story collection it is one of the most satisfying I have come across for years.

MR. ADAM by Pat Frank.
Panther Book, 2s.

It isn't often that we get a well-written, tongue-in-cheek science fiction satire, but when we do it is something most of us don't want to miss. *Mr. Adam* is just that, and at the price you simply can't go wrong.

The atomic boys have finally gone a step too far and touched off an atomic explosion, the after-effects of which causes men to become sterile while leaving their womenfolk untouched. Fortunately for the future of the race, one man—only one—is left untouched. Heaven for the lucky one? Homer Adam didn't think so—and he had good reason to know.

Don't miss this one.

THE HARP STATESIDE by Walter Willes, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, N. Ireland, 2s., 70 quarto pages. Illus.

This is a fan publication, but a fan publication with a difference. It is beautifully produced, amazingly well illustrated, well bound

and has something to say of general, other than esoteric, interest. It is the report of the first fan to travel overseas to attend a science fiction convention aided by contributed money under the TAFF scheme.

For non-fans I should explain that TAFF—The Transatlantic Fan Fund—is designed to offer financial aid to a notable fan personality of some other country so as to enable him, or her, to attend a World Convention. The success of this enterprise is recorded in *The Harp Stateside*, in which Walt Willes tells of his adventures both in getting to, and at, the 1952 Convention in Chicago, U.S.A.

Walt writes with a wry sense of dry humour which I, personally, find excellent. Illustrated by Arthur Thompson, who has his own rib-cracking style, the production is guaranteed to appeal to every fan everywhere. If you are not a fan and yet are still interested in a vicarious tour of a foreign country, then you will enjoy it, too.

And, remember, TAFF is still a healthily operating scheme.

SCIENCE AND FICTION by Patrick Moore, F.R.A.S. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 10s. 6d., 192 pages.

This is a book written by someone who has taken a look at the field of literature known as "science



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ICS

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fiction," found it not to his liking, and then has calmly proceeded to condemn it because of that.

Unfair? Well, that is the impression I got from the book. The author, obviously, has a great respect for accepted scientific theory and has overlooked that, after all, it is only *theory*. His comments on the bad writing to be found in science fiction magazines, especially those of the past, I agree with, but when he praises the classical writers: Lucian, Cyrano and, later on, Wells and Verne as being scientifically accurate, then I must disagree.

The book itself is disjointed; for example, one entire chapter is devoted to decrying the lurid comic-books with an analysis of their "science fiction" content, but the admission is made at the end of the chapter that these comic-books are not really representative of science fiction at all!

The chapter on Comment and Review, one of the shortest in the book, contains some odd sayings. Magazine reviews are dismissed with: *There is no harm in this sort of thing so long as it is confined to the lower literary strata . . .* And Mr. Moore feels that: *Probably the soundest science fiction reviews of today are to be found in the morning Press. Here the critic is usually a skilled journalist, without any deep scientific knowledge, but with a good appreciation of what*

is wholesome and what is likely to prove popular. Besides, he is often too young to remember the pulps, and is thus less likely to be prejudiced.

In light of the above, Mr. Moore's statements on page 73 are illuminating. He mentions a pre-war science fiction magazine which contained quotes which, if repeated, would raise strong objections with Her Majesty's Censor—and rightly so. *The magazine concerned was American, but I found it in the twopenny tray of a London bookshop, and had I not bought it (and, after perusal, burned it), some boy might easily have done so.*

The main trouble is, I think, that the author has his own strong ideas on what constitutes science fiction and has divided the field into two parts. Type 1: Those which are scientifically inaccurate; Type 2: Those which are as accurate as they can be made in the light of our present knowledge, though a good deal of licence must necessarily be allowed.

Mr. Moore does not like stories of the first type and decries magazines for not adhering wholly to those of the second. The crowning point of the book comes at the end, where, in an appendix, he advocates a censorship of science fiction to standards of wholesomeness and accuracy as determined by himself.